AA 000 376 223 3

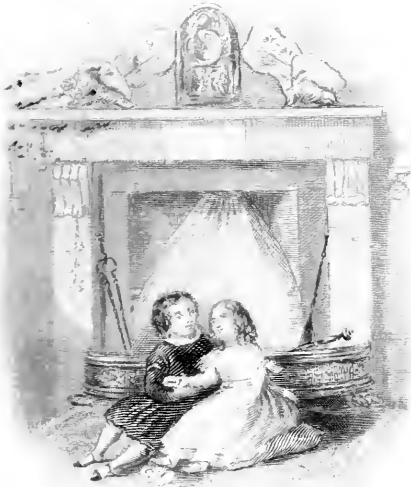
THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF

California State Library

books, and of the dates thereof; and it shall be his duty to carry
he provisions of this Act into execution, and sue for all injuries
one to the Library, and for all penalties under this Act.

Jas. Allen, State Print.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/whoshallbegreate00howi

WHO SHALL BE GREATEST!

BY MARY HOWITT,

AUTHOR OF "STRIVE AND THRIVE," "HOPE ON! HOPE EVER!" "SOWING AND REAPING," ETC. ETC

NEW-YORK:
D. APPLETON & COMPANY,
346 & 348 BROADWAY.
M.DCCC.LVII.

PR
4809
H2 W

WHO SHALL BE GREATEST?

CHAPTER I.

TWO OF MISS WYNDHAM'S YOUNG LADIES.

Gloucester, Dec. 29th, 179—

My adorable Elvira—I am sure you will give me credit for all the delight I feel in leaving "Miss Wyndham's Establishment for Young Ladies." I dismiss all thoughts of school and its annoyances for ever! Madame and her French exercises, Monsieur Pirouette and his *chassé*, thank Heaven, I have heard the last of them! Oh, how I pity you, that have twelve months of endurance yet before you! Poor little soul! I can see you, in my mind's eye, frowning defiance to all the horrid creatures!

But, my dearest Elvira, do not be utterly miserable. Time flies fast. Only think! it is but six months, this very day, since we had the supreme happiness of meeting—of forming that friendship which will be enduring as the stars! Oh, my sweet friend, think not that in absence your Miranda can forget you. Your beloved image is ever present with me. I dream of you by night, and think of you by day; and, though I am released from the hateful rule of Wyndham

House, I am but half myself, for my heart remains with you!

There is no one here that can understand me. You, and you only, my Elvira, penetrated the recesses of my heart, and did me justice! Oh the sweet moonlight walks on the flags, when our fond souls commingled, and poured out their eternal vows! Do you not remember them? No, my Elvira, you have not forgotten those sweet times! And one night, of all others to be remembered, has registered itself in my heart's core; you remember it too!—there was a nightingale in Mr. Smith's chestnut at the moment, the sweet Philomela—you have not forgotten it! Oh, pardon me for hinting of such treason—to forget is impossible!

For oh, how vast a memory has love!

There is to be an Infirmary Ball next month, and the Misses Curtis, my cousins, about whom I told you that odd story about the calamanco petticoat, are to come out of the country to go with us; my father insisted upon it, or I should never have proposed it, for they are a couple of complete frights, and dress so ill. I have not decided whether to go in pink or lemon-colour. I have a lemon-coloured chambray, which my godmother gave me—a very sweet thing, and it is divinely made; and I have a pink silk slip; but lemon-colour, you know, is a bad candle-light colour, and I have worn my pink slip, so I am quite undetermined; I want the benefit of your sweet taste. Pray write by the return of post, and give my love to Anne Ward. Poor thing! how good-natured she is! Do you know, I called at her uncle's before we left the

town, for we were an hour too soon for the coach, and she took me into her bed-room. I do believe they are poor; they have only one little back parlour, quite small and mean, and only one servant —quite a scrub of a girl—although, I must say, she was much neater than one might have expected, and very civil and obliging to me. I am sure that chain of Anne Ward's is not gold, from something I saw: but I forget what I am doing; for this letter, of course, goes to her care; but then, I think she would scorn to do a dishonourable action: and, after all, I should not care if she saw every word I have written. I always speak my mind, you know; I am open as the day, and I love Anne Ward. I foresee that she and you, my sweet friend, will be consolation to each other. Anne Ward and I were very near being dear friends, if you had not come. Sister of my soul, we should have been so; but Anne Ward would never have been all that the amiable Elvira is, to her devoted and attached

MIRANDA.

P.S.—I have bought a locket to put your sweet hair in; I shall wear it next my heart. Where you are, I ever will be. Adieu!

Such was the letter which Sarah Gibson addressed to her friend, Rebecca Wells, the week after their sorrowful parting in the school-room of "Miss Wyndham's Establishment for Young Ladies," when, with weeping sensibility, they protested that they never should be happy till they met again.

Sarah Gibson, otherwise "Miranda," was the

daughter of a wealthy grocer in the city of Gloucester. Her mother, an excellent and sensible woman, died in her infancy. A distant relation, a most precise person as to dress and demeanour, the very pink of housewives, as far as methodical routine and the sharp management of servants went, supplied, after Mrs. Gibson's death, her place as female head of the family. Cousin Judith, for so she was called, was spoken of by all her acquaintance as an inimitable woman; so exact in her housekeeping; so rigid a disciplinarian of servants; so never-failing in her attendance on Wednesday morning prayers, and three services on the Sunday! She was, every body said, a good woman; and so she believed herself, thinking, as every body thought, that it was fortunate for Mr. Gibson to have such a relative at his service. In one thing, however, Cousin Judith failed—she had no skill in the management of the child; this was the part of her cousin's establishment in which she professed no interest. It is true, that the little girl was well fed, and well clothed—that came into the general house-keeping; but the forming her mind and manners was left to fate.

Little Sarah Gibson ran wild about the house; she sate upon the kitchen dresser, of a morning, to watch the cook; or, with her hair powdered with dust, helped the housemaid to make the beds; or, which was best of all, played behind the counter with shopmen and apprentices, and rode down into the lower warehouses in the empty crane rope, until ordered into the house by her father, who wondered, good, easy man, "what all the

women could be about, that they did not look after the child." Cousin Judith, on such occasions, never failed to cuff her ears and send her to the housemaid to have her hands and face washed, and a clean pinafore put on; remarking, that "it really was one person's work to look after her."

In process of time she went to a day-school; learned to read and write and cypher: (the church catechism she had been taught by cousin Judith,) to work a sampler, and to do plain sewing, which included button-hole-stitch, back-stitching, and change-stitch; and in twelve months made her father four shirts. In the course of the next three years she worked a hearth-rug, in which was a hen and chickens; two foot-stools—they were not called ottomans in those days; two pair of kettle-holders, and the parting of Tippoo Saib and his children, in embroidery of bright-coloured silks upon white satin; which was duly framed and glazed, and hung up in the parlour at home. Her works were manifold, and Cousin Judith declared that she bade fair to be a very accomplished and well-behaved young lady, quite a credit to them all.

By this time, of course, she had left off playing with the shopmen, or riding in the crane-rope. She began to eschew the shop, and made her entries and exits invariably by the street-door. She was now thirteen, and full of budding sensibilities and gentilities. She had read all the love stories in a long series of the Ladies' Magazine; which, with Ready-Reckoners, old Dictionaries, and Almanacs, well-worn Cookery Books, two Bibles and three Prayer Books, covered with green baize, filled the shelves of the book-case at home.

A new world was opened; Sarah grew romantic and sentimental, carried her head on one side, wore long ringlets, and sighed deeply and often. But as, with all this, she contrived to keep out of everybody's way—either in her own chamber, or in a little wooden booth, otherwise alcove, which, in former years, had been pea-green, but now was drab with age, which stood in a corner of the quadrangle behind the warehouses, misnamed the garden, where she undisturbedly read her favourite literature—nobody within thought about her, or concerned themselves with her occupation. Or, if she were spoken of, it was with commendation; she was so improved, gave so little trouble, and was so fond of reading, said Cousin Judith; and her father was too busy with his worldly affairs to think of inquiring what she read, or whence came the books, seeing there were so few at home. All seemed to be going on quite right; and Sarah, in the meantime, had read every book she could borrow, either from servant, shopman, or schoolfellow, and was growing rather tall and good-looking, and had began to think it vulgar to be a grocer's daughter, and to wish the family name had been Belville, or Melville, or Seymour, or Belmont, or anything more interesting than the common name of Gibson.

Of course, no girl's education could be complete who had not been to a boarding-school, and Cousin Judith was desired by Mr. Gibson to inquire among her acquaintance for a finishing school, where Sarah might be placed for a year, and thus gain that polish which, staying at home, she could not be expected to acquire.

Cousin Judith failed not to make inquiries; and the "Establishment for Young Ladies" at Wyndham House, being the largest, and most expensive, and the farthest off—for people always think best of those schools of which they have the least means of gaining correct information—Wyndham House was accordingly selected.

No young lady ever entered Miss Wyndham's Establishment better provided with wardrobe, money, and all extras, than Miss Gibson. Cousin Judith took her in a post-chaise; and, as she herself wore a rich silk dress, a well-furred cloak and velvet hat, and ensconced her arms up to the elbows in an expensive muff, and altogether assumed a very dignified air, Miss Wyndham and all her establishment paid her the profoundest respect, and received the new pupil from her hands as if she had been an angel come from heaven.

Sarah Gibson professed herself wretched at school; she had to begin French; to learn to dance; to learn to play upon two or three instruments; and she looked back to the idle days spent in the old alcove, over the beloved romances, with a regret that refused to be allayed. She declared herself "the most wretched of created beings;" she was sure twelve months at Wyndham House would kill her! She even wished she were dead—thought of a sharp pen-knife, or a leap into a well, and worked herself into an agony of weeping, in the thought of the newspaper paragraph, and the elegy in the "poet's corner," on "the death of an unfortunate young lady aged fifteen." But grief did not kill her; and, at the close of the first half year, when she returned home, spite of all her protesta-

tions about her school miseries, her father, seconded by Cousin Judith, was arbitrary as to her return. Before the close of the twelve months, Miss Wyndham had solicited, by letter, a second term of twelve months, assuring her father, and excellent Mrs. Judith, that she was her favourite pupil, and was making such astonishing progress in her studies, that it would be a pity to interrupt them.

Mr. Gibson gave consent; and, to Sarah's chagrin, she was returned to Wyndham House for another twelve months. But she took with her means of defence against the annoyances of the place. She furnished herself with all the love-histories, dream-books, valentine-writers, books of fate, and affecting narratives of unhappy wives, and maidens crossed in love—some stitched in paper covers, and others bound volumes; some borrowed, and some bought; which were stowed in the bottom of her play-box, into which the prying eyes of Miss Wyndham, nor even the teacher, could enter. With the help of these, Sarah got through the first half-year. Similarly provided, she returned to school for the last term; but fate had great things in store for her—the pleasures and solacements of friendship—the union of a sister-mind, as she herself would have said.

Rebecca Wells, the "Elvira" of our opening epistle, was a new boarder, who came to school three days before Sarah Gibson's return for the last half-year; and, according to these young ladies, "their souls melted into one at the first moment." Rebecca was not less sentimental than her new friend; but in some respects she was

rather different. She was the eldest child of a large family, whose mother had lately married a second husband. They lived in that part of Yorkshire called Craven, and the step-father was a large grazier—"a well-to-do man," but of rough nature, who thought his wife, spite of her seven children, "the very jewel of womankind—the cleverest woman in the universe." "Why, she could keep his books better than he could; nothing was above her hand; she had even judgment in fat cattle!" Such was Mr. Hackett's protestation respecting his new wife. She was, emphatically, "a manager;" she had been so all her days; and, so admirably had things prospered under her hand, that during the life-time of Mr. Wells, her first husband, Mr. Hackett, her second, declared he was keeping himself single for her sake.

Rebecca, the eldest of Mrs. Wells's seven children, was, at the time of her mother's second marriage, in her fifteenth year. Her youth had been one of hardship and drudgery; not that her mother had treated her with cruelty, or stinted her in food, or been niggard of clothing; but she was of a hard screwing nature: work was the object of life, in her eyes, and management was genius. It was wonderful what an amount of work she did herself, and what an amount also she extracted from every one about her. Her one servant did as much as other people's three or four; and yet that said servant looked always neat and clean. "It is all management," said Mrs. Wells; "idleness is my abhorrence!' and then she backed her opinion and practice by innumerable wise saws and sayings, all tending to prove, that from the

days of Solomon downwards, "the slothful man never gets rich."

Mrs. Wells's house was the pattern of order: no child ever dared to soil the clean passages with a dirty foot-print, or to litter even a thread upon the spotless carpet: care and exactitude were the rule of everything. No spot of gravy ever defiled her table-cloths; and if John Wesley, and his brothers and sisters, had learned at six months old to cry softly and to fear the rod, so did all the little Wellses learn to eat their bread and milk without spilling, in the shuddering sensation of a whipping.

"She was a clever woman!" avowed many a man to his less exact wife; "an incomparably clever woman!" Poor Mr. Wells, however, never had commended her so warmly. He had had bad health, and was of a nervous, timid temper; and, after he had worn a flannel night-cap by the fire for upwards of three years, and had learned to be patient, even in witnessing the rigid discipline to which his children were subjected, he took to his bed, and in a few months was wrapped in a flannel shroud and carried to his last home.

"Poor Wells!" his wife would say, "I don't know what would have come of me and the children, if I had not kept things together! and I am sure I have nothing to charge myself with as regards him. I never let him have the trouble of looking after even a shoe-tie; nor would I let the children racket about to disturb him. I have nothing to reproach myself with as regards him, and that's a comfort!"

Comfort came easily to the widow. "There was

nothing like employment," she said, "for curing grief; and, now that she had seven fatherless children to care for, it behoved her to keep her senses about her."

What a managing woman she was! Every pair of old stockings was cut into socks for the lesser children; not a gown was put away till it had been turned and turned again, and dyed after all. There was no end to the patching, and darning, and mending of old clothes. Uncostly substitutes for everything that cost money, were in request. Every scrap of paper was hoarded up, and cut into strips for paper pillows; and even a paper carpet was made, to save the common Kidderminster: and when poor Rebecca, who, at the time of her father's death, was fourteen, had completed her task-work of mending and making, of dusting and putting by, and would take a little pastime of her own, she was invariably asked by her mother "what she was idling for?" and bade to "go on with that knitting," or to "fetch the patchwork basket; for no good ever came of folding the hands together!"

What made Rebecca's fate particularly hard was, that she possessed her father's temperament, and was naturally of a quiet, sensitive turn of mind; upon which the bustling, unwearying disposition of her mother operated like the working of a file. She had, unfortunately for herself, a turn for poetry; carried a book of poems always in her pocket, which she read and studied in secret. Never did miser keep his golden treasures more jealously under lock and key than did she keep certain "addresses to the moon," "odes to

melancholy," and "love elegies," of her own composing, from the knowledge of her mother. Sometimes they were hidden under her linen, in the farthest recesses of her chest of drawers; and sometimes even between the mattress and sacking of her bed: but as her mother, like all managers, was in the habit of paying visits, at uncertain periods, to every drawer and box in the house, and turned over mattresses and feather-beds also, to see that all was clean and in right order, the poor girl was in a state of constant excitement, lest these precious labours of her brain should meet the eye of her mother, which was more prying than that of Argus, and more severe than that of Zoilus.

In process of time Mrs. Wells bestowed upon herself a second mate—Mr. Hackett, the rich grazier, of whom we have before spoken. This circumstance in some degree bettered the condition of poor Rebecca; not that her step-father was at all addicted to poetry himself, or could have sympathized with the morbid sensibilities of her nature; but Mr. Hackett was accustomed to the sight of fat, sleek, and comfortable cattle, and the anxious, harassed looks of Rebecca quite troubled him. He declared that "there was no necessity for his wife, or her children, to slave themselves as they did to save a penny, for they had plenty, and so had he; and he would put an end to it!" He accordingly forbade any more old gowns to be dyed; put a paper pillow on the back of the fire; and declared that "Becky should no longer sit moping over patchwork, but should go for a couple of years to a 'finishing school,' and learn to enjoy herself!"

Mr. Hackett was not a timid man, like poor Mr. Wells; he had a loud voice, and a loud laugh; and, occasionally, could be vehemently angry, especially if anybody opposed his wishes; so his wife, judging that retreat was the better part of valour in all contests matrimonial, at least, made a merit of necessity, and turned over the Morning Post newspaper, for school-advertisements, since her husband allowed her the choice of a school for her own daughter.

Why she chose Miss Wyndham's Establishment, in preference to the hundred and fifty other schools, advertisements of which met her eye at the same time, is not for us to say; for Wyndham House had no especial claim to superior cheapness, nor otherwise recommended itself to the eye of a manager, unless it were, that it professed to instruct its pupils in a greater variety of knowledge, and thus seemed to give more for the money. However, to Wyndham House it was decided that Miss Wells should be sent; and again the more liberal spirit of the step-father befriended her. He insisted upon her having a sufficient and respectable wardrobe, minus all her former mended garments and dyed frocks; and poor Rebecca felt wonderfully grateful. But, to have obtained the fullness of Rebecca's gratitude, her father should have allowed her to remain at home, and have ensured her there the uninterrupted indulgence of her poetic sensibilities. She had a shrinking dread of new faces; and, to go to a school of which she only knew the name, which was seventy miles from her own home, was as fearful as transportation. There was no one but a young woman employed

in the family as seamstress—an unheard-of thing before the days of Mr. Hackett—and who had won her heart by repeating Alcanza and Zaida, as they sat together one day at work, to whom she could unbosom her grief.

But the time at length came, when all her new clothes were made and packed up, and when, to use her own phrase, she was to be severed from all she loved; and then, weeping till her eyes were red, and then washing her face to remove the effects of weeping, she found herself seated in the large gig beside her step-father, with one of her brothers between them, and her black leather trunk strapped on behind, on her way to Wyndham House.

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOL FRIENDSHIP.

THREE days of inconsolable weeping ushered in Rebecca Wells's school campaign. For the first day her lessons were remitted, and she was allowed to retire to bed as soon as tea was over—"a great favour," Miss Wyndham assured her, adding, in an audible *sotto voce*, that she "had never seen such a fright as that girl, with her red eyes and bleared countenance."*

No way consoled by this disparaging observation, Rebecca sate down at the foot of the bed,

* Miss Wyndham and her Establishment, it must be remembered, existed fifty years ago: we cannot believe a lady of the present day would violate good feeling and good breeding to an equal extent.

and cried more than ever; and so she might have sate and cried all night, had she not shrunk from encountering the curious eyes of the young ladies, which, to her, seemed much like running the gantlet among savage Indians. She therefore slowly undressed herself, and, having fortunately been informed which among the eight beds that filled this room, was half designed for her use, crept into it, and, with heavy sighs and hysterical sobs, laid her head upon the hard bolster.

The second day was no better than the first; nay, in reality it was worse, for lessons had to be learned and said; and it seemed to her excited mind as if all the school business was suspended to listen to her agitated voice. The third day was worse than the second, for her head ached violently, and she perceived that she was openly ridiculed. In the evening she was again permitted to retire early to bed, with the comfortable assurance, that in the morning she must take a dose of medicine to remove her head-ache.

She had hitherto slept alone, as her destined bedfellow had not arrived—a certain Miss Gibson, of whom much was said, but nothing favourable, and of whom she had conceived dislike and dread. At bed-time, when the young ladies entered the chamber, the first word she heard in the chamber-whisper, was the name of Miss Gibson, and a strange voice in reply. Miss Gibson had then arrived. She shrunk into the smallest possible space in bed, and pretended to be asleep. Not a word passed between them; and, from pretending to be asleep, she at length sunk into real slumber, and was woke next morning by her companion

lightly raising her head on the bolster, and settling herself so as to throw the light of the window, near which their bed stood, upon the pages of a book she was reading. Rebecca still counterfeited sleep, and then cautiously surveyed her companion. She was a round-faced girl with a dark complexion, and eyes that appeared to be large and dark, but the lids and lashes of which she could only yet see; but the book she was reading was poetry.

What a joyful circumstance! Miss Gibson, the dreaded bedfellow, then was fond of poetry—perhaps wrote poetry! Rebecca remembered her own compositions, hidden under the bed from the eyes of her mother; she remembered how she had carried a copy of Waller's Poems and Hammond's Love Elegies in her pocket for weeks, reading a secret page now and then. It was wonderful how all the annoyances and vexations of her home rose up at once before her. School, with the poetical Miss Gibson for a bedfellow, seemed endurable; and, with a palpitating heart, she opened her eyes wide, and fixed them on her companion in a sort of desperation to know what her fate would be. Their eyes met; and, to use their own phrase, their souls melted into one at the first glance.

It was the Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard that Miss Gibson was reading: from that moment they were sworn friends.

Who does not know how romantic school girls are in their friendships. Our Sarah and Rebecca were the most romantic of school girls. They copied out in little books every encomium on

friendship; the more extravagant the better. They exchanged locks of hair, tied with true-love knots of blue silk, and wore them round their necks. They confided profound secrets to each other; they invented a secret way of conversing, and new characters in which they wrote to each other, not a day passing in which sundry little notes were not slipped into each other's hands, with an air of most interesting mystery. This exclusiveness made them greatly disliked by their schoolfellows; but that very dislike was only an additional bond of union—they endured persecution for each other's sake.

One young lady, however, the former half-year's friend of Sarah Gibson, and a day scholar, was admitted into the porch of the temple of friendship—this was the Anne Ward of whom Miss Gibson spoke in the letter we have already given. As a day scholar, Anne Ward was a very convenient person. She made purchases for them in the town; obtained books for them secretly from the circulating library, and promised to put Miss Wells's letters in the post-office, and receive the answers under cover to herself, when the half-year was ended which was to be the period of Miss Gibson's school life.

It will readily be believed that names so unromantic and unpoetical as Sarah and Rebecca, would not suit the elevated tastes of these young ladies. One of the first acts of their friendship, therefore, was to select names more in accordance with their notions, and which would sound well in their epistolary intercourse. Amanda, and Delia, and Sophonisba, and Sigismunda, and Jesse,

were duly thought of, and tried even with such tests as "my sweet Amanda;" "Delia, sister of my soul;" "my gentle Sophonisba;" "the amiable Sigismunda;" "the too-sensitive Jesse;" but, none of them exactly coming up to the mark, for two weeks Rebecca Wells bore the name of Sappho, and Sarah Gibson of Eloisa; but these were, in the end, abandoned for those of Elvira and Miranda, taken, we believe, from Mrs. Rowe's "Letters from the Dead to the Living;" a volume wonderfully admired by them, particularly where any ghostly correspondent expatiates on the eternity and tenderness of friendship.

This extravagant friendship did not, as might have been expected, die either a speedy natural death, or gradually fade away of itself; on the contrary, after five or six years we find the same style of letters passing between them; one of which, being of more than ordinary importance, we must be allowed to lay before our readers; yet, before we do so, a word or two must be permitted on the states of their respective families.

Mr. Gibson, the rich grocer, had had during three years many losses in trade, and many people began to suspect that he was not quite as rich as had been imagined. He had, moreover, been visited by an apoplectic fit, and was thought to be gradually breaking. He had taken his foreman into partnership, and, people imagined, intended to marry him to his daughter. Cousin Judith counselled such a step, as one of convenience and prudence; but the high-spirited Miranda had not spent her youth in romantic visions, to end by becoming the wife of a grocer! She looked

haughty and indignant at the proposal, and both her father and Cousin Judith were dumb-foundered with wonder as to what was come of her senses. Miss Gibson, however, spite of the suggested idea that her father's purse was not as full as it had been, vowed that she would marry nothing less than a professional man. She studied the fashions in the pocket-books and newspapers; dressed expensively; carried her head loftily, both literally and metaphorically; attended the assize-balls and races, and looked out for a husband of her own choosing.

Rebecca Wells, otherwise "the gentle Elvira," on her half-yearly returns home had found things gradually assuming a different, and certainly not a more comfortable character. When she left school she had ceased to write poetry—her sensibilities found an outlet in the letters she penned to her beloved Miranda; but she had not become less romantic nor sentimental than formerly. At home, however, although things were gradually changed, there was still no sympathy for romance or sentiment; Mr. Hackett had now become perfectly lord of the ascendant; yet, notwithstanding this, his wife—not a whit less careful and exact than formerly—made never-ending efforts to regain her power. The house was as elaboratcly clean as ever; but then Mr. Hackett chose to make it dirty, to prove that he was master of his own establishment. Oh, how unlike the former good man, who dared hardly to say that his soul was his own. Mr. Hackett even smoked in the best parlour!

Poor Rebecca, she had cried for three whole

days when she first went to school; she had quite as good reason to cry for three likewise, on her final return home. She soon found how cheerless was the prospect before her; year after year went on, and it was no better. Her own brothers and sisters, it is true, were all at home with her; but they were neither loveable nor kindly affectionate among themselves. Love had never been a ruling sentiment of the household; it had been a government of force and fear; and, now that they saw the power of her who had hitherto been the domestic tyrant wavering, each thought there was a chance for him or for her, and all were at strife together; while Rebecca, the only gentle and malleable one of the family, was by turns the confidant and slave of all.

It was, indeed, a miserable home; and, to add to its other discomforts, a young family of Hacketts was springing up, as boisterous, even in their infancy, as their father. No wonder was it, therefore, that Rebecca felt eternally grateful to her friend for two invitations to Gloucester, for a month each time. The first visit, however, was cut suddenly short by a summons home during the first week, on account of her step-father having been thrown from his horse, and her mother being laid up with a bilious attack. The second, however, was more fortunate, and the month's visit extended itself to two months. Those two months were bright spots in the desert of her life. They were heaven, she averred; they were elysium! they were paradise! There was no end to the epithets that were bestowed upon them. There was no end either to the closettings and confiden-

tial communings of the two friends, which continued through every day of the two months, yet were as mysterious and as important on the last day as on the first.

The cruel design of marrying the "sweet Miranda" to the young grocer was, of course, a fertile topic of conversation. Rebecca thought in her inmost mind, but she did not even confide it to her friend, that, were the young grocer to make proposals for her hand, she should not hesitate a moment in accepting; but assuredly it was no match for Miranda, her sweet friend, for whom no peer in the land were too good.

Worthy Mr. Gibson, and Cousin Judith, and even Mr. Samford, the young grocer himself, looked frowningly on Rebecca, who, they judged rightly, had strengthened Sarah's opposition to their wishes; but Sarah was too important and authoritative a person in her father's house, not to have her own way. Her visit, therefore, was protracted week after week. It was in vain that she was willing to gain Mr. Samford's good opinion by many a little innocent civility; the young man was as obdurate as a stone, and poor Rebecca, at the end of the tenth week, returned without any prospects in life, to the comfortless home of her childhood.

Having premised thus much, we will give a letter, written by Miss Gibson to her friend, a full twelvemonth after the happy visit we have just described; but, as it announces a most important event, it is quite worthy to open a new chapter.

CHAPTER III.

A WEDDING.

MISS GIBSON TO MISS WELLS.

Gloucester, March 24, 1802.

I HAVE not my sweet Elvira at hand, or I should fly to her at this moment, and with blissful tears and crimson blushes pour out to her the secret of my full heart; but

> Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
> Some banish'd lover, or some captive maid;
> They live, they speak, they breathe what love inspires,
> Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires;
> The virgin's wish without her fears impart,
> Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart,
> Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
> And waft a sigh from Indus to the pole.

Therefore, I seize upon the ready pen, my own Elvira, and despatch "a paper messenger of love," to bid your generous heart rejoice with me. Yes, my sweet friend, rejoice with me, for I am supremely happy!

But why should I defraud your amiable bosom by concealing aught from you? Know then, my sweet friend, that your Miranda is beloved! Is beloved by—you guess whom! Oh, my Elvira, Mr. Browne revealed his sentiments towards your friend last evening. But you are impatient to know all, and you have a right to know it—you who have held the key of my heart so long.

Listen, then, and if I can be calm, I will pen

down a sober narrative. In my last I told you that the dear assize-ball was approaching. How little did I think that very ball was to seal my fate! You know how interesting the assize-ball would be to me, for it was there we first met—this very time last year. I went with Mrs. Cotterel Warwick; we were a party of five—Adeliza Jemima, Mr. Foster, Mr. Cotterel Warwick, and myself. I went in high spirits, for my heart beat with a strong emotion at the very name of the assize-ball. You remember my description of *his* person last year; he looked even more fascinating this year than last. He is, as I then told you, a young solicitor, of Woodburn in Cheshire. My father, who thinks a deal of pounds, shillings, and pence, is quite satisfied. What! is it come to that? I hear you say. Yes, my sweet love, it is. My father and he had a closetting this morning. I could not help peeping in at the key-hole; but I was sure all would go on right. Cousin Judith, poor soul, is angry—I am sure she is, for I know her spiteful eyes so well—that I have got a lover of my own choosing, and that Samford may go hang!

But I must tell you, for I know your dear little heart will be unsatisfied, if I do not give you all particulars, how I was dressed at the ball, and how my dear Browne was dressed also. I had on a white poplin skirt and green satin body, and a wreath of ivy leaves in my hair. I know I was looking my very best, for, the moment I entered the room, he came up to me, and complimented me on my looks. You know that we had met last year, and had danced together then, so

that we were old acquaintance; and he said some things, which I could not misunderstand, about a vacuum of soul which had endured twelve months. But oh, if you could only hear how delightfully he pays a compliment! I never heard anybody speak so well before; and, do you know, he was complimented by the judge, in open court, for the way in which he gave his evidence about some law business. He is *so* clever! and, to my taste, so handsome! I grant that he is not a giant in size; but then, you know, I never admired giants. No Samfords for me! Apropos of Samford: I must tell you something about him before I have done; but I must not omit to tell you how Browne was dressed. He had on a blue coat, white waistcoat, and black pantaloons; there is quite a style about him. I never was at such a delightful ball; but then, you will say, even a desert with love would be a paradise! Ah! I know your sentiments—do I not?

And now, my sweet friend, are you not filled with envy of my great happiness? No; you are too amiable—too generous to be envious! But I must claim the fulfilment of an old promise from you, that you will be my bridesmaid, and that you will go with me to Woodburn. What a happiness to have the sister of my soul with me, under my own roof, and that the home of my dear Browne! Now, you will not be faithless about the old promise.

I told *him* about you, and that he must not be jealous, if I give him only half my heart. I'll tell you what he said—"Whoever you love comes recommended by the sweetest claim to my heart!"

Was it not prettily said? and he laid his hand on his heart. I was sure he felt it. You would doat upon him.

You must not let there be any difficulty about your being my bridesmaid; it is an old promise, and I shall not let you off. I will write to Mr. and Mrs. Hackett about it, if you like, for we shall be married in the autumn; *he* declares he will not wait any longer. Write to me by return of post, for he leaves to-morrow, and I shall be wretched when he is gone. Adieu, my sweet Elvira, and believe me ever your own faithful and most happy

MIRANDA.

P.S.—But I have forgotten to tell you about Samford. They say he pays his addresses to Jemima Warwick; and, I am sure, if he do she will have him, for she is made for a tradesman's wife. She is a pattern-person, in Cousin Judith's eyes.

I told Browne what were our names; he thought them very pretty, but persisted in calling me Amanda, because it had something to do with love. Was not that a pretty way of complimenting?

The "sweet Elvira" did unquestionably feel her pulse quicken when she read of her friend's new prospects. Whether, however, her heart was filled with unalloyed happiness is more than we can say; something like the feeling that all good fell to the lot of the happy Miranda, while she had no joy in which to bless herself, crossed her mind.

Miranda was a whole year younger than herself and had already refused a lover whom she would gladly have accepted, and was now about to be united to the very man, who, if it had been given her to choose, she would have selected from all the world. Poor Rebecca! she felt as if her lot was all of a piece. She certainly was made anything but happy by her friend's letter. Still there was, after all, a bright side which, after the first influence of the letter had ceased, she could by no means pass over; "her own Miranda was a faithful friend, who, in the midst of all this new happiness, did not forget her. The old bridesmaid-promise was claimed; and, to Rebecca, whose home was so uninviting, any prospect of change, and especially of a visit which promised to resemble the elysium of ten weeks, was like a prospect into a golden paradise. "And who knows," whispered the heart of Rebecca, "but my fate may unfold itself at Woodburn?" She glanced at the mirror before her, with a sentiment natural to every female heart, because founded on the desire to please and to be loved; she saw the face and form she had seen thousands of times before, and felt the comfortable assurance that the face was passingly agreeable, and the form good. Why, then, should she not please?—why should not she meet with some James Browne of her own, as well as her friend? There was a delightful flutter in her spirits at once; she saw herself, as the bridesmaid, well-dressed and cheerful—for she could be cheerful, or sentimental, for either character suited her—an object of interest and curiosity, and to the single even more interesting

than the bride. She felt at once as if a happy destiny lay before her; the little town of Woodburn, the existence of which she had hardly been aware of before, seemed big with her fate; and, ten minutes after, she was turning over the old school-books in her closet, to find the Gazetteer, that she might read what was said of so interesting a town. She possessed herself of the important knowledge, that Woodburn stood on the river, over which it had a bridge of seven arches; that its population was 8000, without any staple manufactures that it had two fairs in the year, and its market was held on the Wednesday. It was but little, but it was enough. Woodburn lay before her in her life's future, like the goal towards which her destinies pointed.

A moment's cloud came over her spirit, in the question, Would her mother and step-father consent to the visit? They might oppose it; it was very probable they would; but she resolved with herself, that in that case she would for ever take the law into her own hands. She was now mistress of the income of her own little fortune, and, though she had not hitherto acted in opposition to the heads of the family, she determined on this occasion, which was so interesting, and might be so momentous, to please herself, and ask favour from no one.

We need not give her reply to her amiable Miranda; it was such as may readily be imagined—full of sentiment and poetic flights, and professions of the most eternal friendship; but we will go on to the autumn, to the time fixed for the wedding.

Mr. and Mrs. Hackett threw no insuperable

impediment in the way of Rebecca's visit, so that no heroism on her part seemed likely to be required; nor did he fall from his horse and break his leg, nor did she find herself invalided, or likely to be so, by a bilious attack; so that Rebecca looked on in wonder at the facility of things. The day had been fixed upon, a month before, for her journey; and on that very day, she was conveyed away in the coach with a large portmanteau of well-conditioned clothes, sufficient of themselves to stand a long visit; and sundry five and ten pound bills in her pocket-book beside, wherewith to buy bridesmaid apparel, and to figure as a young lady of substance. Rebecca, seeing that the coach did not break down, nor other misadventures occur during the two first stages of her journey, began to have pleasant hopes that fortune's wheel was taking a turn in her favour. She almost questioned whether, after all, she might not do as well as her friend; and, the nearer she came to Gloucester, the better was she pleased that she and Mr. Samford were only just on speaking terms.

The meeting of the friends was the most rapturous in the world; there was no end to the kissings, and the hand-shakings, for they had not met for near two years; and now, a blissful event was about to unite them closer than ever. It seemed like the highest felicity of human existence, and they blessed themselves because they were such a pair of devoted friends.

The bridal habiliments were now all prepared; for, while we have been writing of friendship, three weeks have been passing on, in which milliners and

dress-makers have been hard at work. And now the garments of the bride-elect lay opened out on one bed in the double-bedded room, and those of the bridesmaid-elect on the other: gowns, scarfs, veils, gloves, and bonnets—the bridesmaid's just one degree inferior to the bride's.

"Well, it will be your turn next, my sweet girl," said Sarah Gibson, while they were surveying, with ineffable pleasure, all the silken pomp that lay before them; and she kissed her as she spoke.

Rebecca shook her head, and said she did not know when; but she wished in her heart—which was a most natural and proper wish at such a time —"that it might, and that soon too!"

The two young ladies then went into the back parlour, where Mr. Gibson sate in his high-backed leather chair, looking very well pleased, and Cousin Judith was busied about tea, leaving all the glory of the next day's garments to be surveyed by the cook and charwoman, who, with their hands folded in their aprons, stole in quietly, to take a leisurely survey not only of them, but of the two great bride-cakes which stood on "the great tea-tray" on the chest of drawers, and which were to be cut up in the evening.

Tea was delayed an hour after the usual time, to wait the arrival of the coach by which the husband-elect was expected. He came; and Rebecca, who, from her friend's description, expected at least an Apollo in brown clothes, was greatly disappointed at his appearance—a short, mean-looking young man, with a sallow complexion, and thin drab hair. He might be professional, he was, no doubt, a prosperous and very clever

lawyer—one to elicit compliments from the judge on the bench—but he was not quite such as her excited imagination expected: why, in point of exterior, Samford, with his shop-apron wound round his body, was more of a man to look at.

All these, however, were observations to be thought, not to be spoken. The bride-elect, it was evident, saw nothing to object to: he called her his "sweet Amanda;" begged to salute her friend, "the amiable Elvira;" laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed very low, evidently possessed with the idea of being a most accomplished person.

The wedding-morning rose with all that brilliancy peculiar to autumnal mornings. That old street of Gloucester in which Mr. Gibson's house stood, with its picturesque gables and projecting porches, seemed to wear quite a holiday aspect.

Rebecca, at seven o'clock, half-opened her window curtains, and glanced up the street and down; and, as she saw the strong lights and shadows that stretched athwart the narrow street, and the brilliant atmosphere, all one burst of dewy sunshine, felt as if it were the most beautiful sight she had ever seen, and ran to her friend's bed-side, with the announcement that "Nature herself was wearing her brightest aspect, in honour of her nuptials."

The youngest apprentice, the porter, and the errand-boy, had been up and busy since before daylight, in the business-regions of the house. The brass-mouldings of the shop-windows, Mr. Samford's modern innovation, polished to their utmost, were now dazzling the eyes of the early passers-by, as the slant rays of the sun were reflected in

them. The shop-windows, emptied over night, had been cleaned and rubbed up; and all the show-goods; japanned tea-chests; nodding mandarins; boxes of raisins; baskets of figs; and black Indians, smoking long pipes; with little cones of sample-sugar, were all newly and neatly arranged. The shop-floor had been carefully swept and watered; the flags before the whole length of the front, and even many yards beyond, on either hand, had been swept and watered likewise; the knocker of the street-door was polished to an extraordinary lustre; and the door-step was as white as hands could make it.

Anybody, with half an eye, who had never heard of Mr. Gibson in all their life, might have known, on passing the house that morning, that something important was about to take place. Mr. Samford, however, although his proper domain, the shop, was thus wearing its best exterior, seemed himself in no holiday humour. He stood with his every-day coat on, and his apron before him, weighing up pounds and half-pounds of raw sugar, with his eyes occupied by his employment, as though nothing beside in the whole world was worth a grown man's attention.

At half-past eight o'clock, idle men and women might be seen standing in little groups and knots, within sight of the grocer's house; the tanner's men were standing at the tan-yard gate, with their sleeves rolled up above their elbows, and with them stood the two dyers from over the way; while three carpenters, carrying deal planks, joined them also, thinking it would not be long before they went to church, especially as, in

passing the Black Bull, they had seen the two chaises out, and one pair of horses; and Jack, the ostler, had said that "the other pair would be out in a jiffy." The milliner's young women, who, on this morning, had been punctual to their time, and who thought it fortunate that the work-room window had such a good view, had taken down the blinds, and sat down on the look-out, ready to jump up at the first moment. The barber's shop was full of people, all waiting to be shaved, but each refusing to submit to the operation, lest his chin should be veiled in suds at the critical moment. There was not a servant within view of the Gibsons, who had not found some excuse to be up stairs, and, with duster in hand, under pretence of being very busy, came ever and anon to the windows; while others, with more leisure or less conscience, leaned out, resting their arms on the stone window-sills. There were women, and big boys, standing with jugs and buckets about the pump, all deferring to move off, till they had seen Miss Gibson go to be married.

At a quarter before nine, the milliner's young women all rushed to the windows, for one of them had given information that the bride was dressed, for she had seen her, in bonnet and veil, pass the bed-room window: she knew the bonnet, for she had helped to make it. "And now, there she was again!" And then came a disputation as to whether it was the bride or the bride's-maid; whether her bonnet had orange flowers in it, or white ribbon: the fair milliners were just getting vehement on this important topic, when a

new object diverted all attention—a chaise from the Black Bull, with white horses, dashed up to the house-door—and the next moment, as if by magic, four young girls in white, and with baskets of flowers in their hands, stood, two on each side, between the steps of the chaise and the house-door. The house-door was thrown open with a loud sound; another chaise then dashed up in the rear; the bride, habited in white from head to foot, leaning on her father's arm, came forth; the young girls scattered their flowers—by the bye, this was a device of Rebecca's;—the chaise moved off; the second was in its place in an instant; as instantly the bridegroom and bridesmaid had entered it, and the two chaises rattled off down the street, across the market-place, and up to the church-gate, drawing a hundred admiring eyes after them.

The tanners and the dyers returned to their respective places; the carpenters carried off their deal planks; the young milliners sat down to await the return; the barber's customers sat down to be shaved; and Mr. Samford went into the back parlour to take his breakfast with the apprentices; while Mrs. Judith was busied with all her handmaidens, in preparing the grand breakfast up stairs, that all might be ready when the happy people returned from church.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER WEDDING.

THERE is something very interesting to us in a wedding. From that of the Queen of England, the lace of whose marriage-dress cost a thousand pounds, down to that of the poor servant girl who leaves her place with her last year's wages in her pocket, and all her worldly goods contained in a papered trunk, to be married to her fellow-servant; ay, even down to the poor cottagers, who have scraped together five pounds wherewith to furnish their cottage, and begin life with a single groat between them; still, as a crisis in human life, as the hinge upon which the future momentously turns for good or for evil, for happiness or for misery, a wedding is always interesting. We hope, therefore, our readers will not think all the little detail which we have given in our last chapter as unimportant, nor yet will be undesirous of knowing how, as is not unfrequently the case, one wedding brought about another.

Mr. and Mrs. Browne spent, not a honeymoon, but a honey-week, in the pleasant neighbourhood of Warwick. It was before the days of the Waverly Novels; still it was quite customary, if ot fashionable, to visit the ruins of Kenilworth, as well as to admire the stately castle of Warwick and its fine pictures. It is generally understood, that nothing is so uninteresting as to be the companion of a new-married couple. They are so taken up by each other, as to have neither time nor

attention for anybody else; anybody else is, in fact, in their way. But poor Rebecca, glad to have any change from the monotony and annoyances of her home, and filled with hopes of all kind and pleasant visions for herself, thought the six days of the honey-week almost as delightful as the bride thought them herself. Moreover, from being accustomed to him and his little polite civilities, she had come to think Mr. Browne one of the most delightful of men, and to marvel at her own want of taste when first they met.

Had Rebecca had any other correspondent beside her "sweet Miranda," she would have indited long sentimental epistles, in which "Hymen's blissful chains," and other similar figures of speech, would have been conspicuous; but, as it was, all those flourishes of rhetoric were kept in her own breast, and she contented herself with knowing that they were a very interesting trio; and with thinking it a thousand pities that all the gay parties, young and old, that they encountered in each day's ramble, did not know who and what they were.

In a little town like Woodburn it was known in every house, in every street and lane, that Mr. Browne, the lawyer, went the last Wednesday to Gloucester to be married, and would, on the next Thursday evening, bring home his wife. Accordingly, everybody was on the look-out; and a very satisfactory account was rendered to those who had not an opportunity of witnessing the arrival of the post-chariot which had been hired for the occasion, even to the smart shade of the bride's travelling pelisse, and the fur with which it was

trimmed. By nine o'clock, not an individual of the town but was apprized of the circumstance, for the ringers had received a couple of guineas, and the little church tower rocked with a peal of joyous welcome.

Mrs. Browne made two discoveries respecting her new position, very soon after she became an inhabitant of Woodburn, which were the first causes of her chagrin. Their house was small, in a bad situation, and only of third or fourth-rate rank, and her husband was by no means the first solicitor of the place: he did not even visit with the grandees of the place; and, ten to one, she would not be called upon by them. She became nervously sensitive, therefore, as to her former connexion with trade, and extremely solicitous that her first appearance should not compromise her claim to the notice of the first people of the neighbourhood. Nobody, however, of superior pretensions made it the rage to visit the bride. Mr. Browne's own acquaintance and friends, and a few clients and their wives, and one or two other families, whose position in society was a sort of debateable ground between the higher and the middle classes, called only to pay them compliments on the occasion—to criticise the bride, in fact, while they ate the cake and drank health and happiness to the new-married couple.

Among Mr. Browne's friends was a Mr. Gregson, a cheese-factor, a very prosperous young man, who lived in a respectable old house, inherited, with his trade, from his father, and which, with its substantial warehouses, larger even than the house itself, stood in Bridge-street, one of the

best streets in Woodburn, with a large walled garden behind it. Gregson was unquestionably a man of great respectability; he understood his business, and was no way ashamed of it; he bought more cheese than any other man in the county, and had ready money always at command. There was not a gentleman farmer, for many and many miles round, with whom he was not greatly in favour, both for his own personal qualities, and for his easy circumstances. He was, according to his own account of himself, "a plain, downright, good sort of fellow, who looked for no better bread than could be made of wheat, and had always a good appetite to give it a relish withal."

Gregson had been an acquaintance of Browne's, from the very day when he first came as an humble writer to the office of Peake and Mordan, the great solicitors of the place; and, now that Browne, to use an American phrase, was "going a-head," Gregson was no less his friend; for he had a pleasure, he said, in seeing an industrious fellow making his way in the world.

Gregson looked in at the office on Friday morning, to wish his friend happiness, and was invited to come in and sup with them on Sunday night, quite in a friendly way. Mrs. Browne, now that she was a solicitor's wife, had, as we have already said, in this early stage of her married life, no very serious intentions of patronising people in trade, further than by the purchase of their goods; therefore, she held herself somewhat lofty when her husband, on Sunday evening, presented to her his friend; and more especially so, as she was then hoping that all the grandees of the town and

neighbourhood would be thronging the doors during the three following days.

Gregson was a hale, robust, ruddy-complexioned man, on whom good air and exercise, riding to fairs and markets, and looking after a prosperous concern, had bestowed sound health and good spirits. Mrs. Browne declared him to be "horridly vulgar, and a great bore," and protested that, if he came often, she would always leave the room. This was the first point of difference between herself and her husband; and, as Rebecca declared, with Mr. Browne, that she thought his friend not only passingly agreeable, but very good-looking, the fair bride grew seriously angry, and that evening closed upon their first disunion.

Mrs. Browne had made up her mind to dislike Gregson: he was vulgar, and a cheese-factor—she was sure, she said, that he smelt of cheese; and, who would visit them if he were to be seen in their drawing-room, with his hands in his pockets, at the windows, just as if he were at home, and lolling in the chair, and leaning back on its hind legs, as he did, talking so loud and freely all the while—she would not endure it: and, besides, it was right for them to respect their standing in society; there certainly was no need for them to associate with cheese-factors, and such-like people! Such were the arguments she used the next morning at breakfast, when the subject was again introduced. Her husband laughed at her, and talked of Gregson's good heart and full purse; but the lady had made up her mind, and would not be convinced. Time, however, brings about changes which no arguments ever could;

and as, spite of all the hopes the lawyer's lady entertained of the "carriage-people" who would call upon them, a few weeks convinced her that, in this particular, fortune had nothing very triumphant in store for her, she began, by degrees, to see less objection to Mr. Gregson, notwithstanding his unabated spirits, and his free and easy way of sitting in her drawing-room. The very marked attention, too, which he had of late been paying to her dear friend, had some influence on her mind; at all events, Mr. Gregson was, and had been, the accustomed daily visitor for upwards of three weeks; the lady of the house being no way behind the others in kindness of welcome.

"Well, Browne, what do you think," said she, one morning in the fifth week of their marriage, "of Rebecca's and Mr. Gregson's prodigious civility to each other?"

"I think," replied he, "that Gregson has made proposals to her."

"*Has* made!" returned the lady.

"Yes," replied he, "that he made proposals this very morning: he told me he should."

"I ought not to be surprised, perhaps," said she; "and yet I must confess that I am, for, someway, I always expected that Rebecca would marry a man of refinement—a real gentleman."

"He is a good fellow," returned Browne, "and I am sure he is not disagreeable to Rebecca."

After this little conversation, Mrs. Browne hastened to her friend, and, according to their own phraseology, "threw herself into her arms, and received into her faithful bosom the secret of her soul."

Rebecca Wells did not quarrel with her fate, because it had given her a lover who was connected with trade. Gregson was a man whom it was easy for her to love; and the happiness and satisfaction she evinced, was infectious through the household. All the old sentimentality was more than renewed, and the two ladies vowed, again and again, "eternal friendship," and believed themselves favourites of the gods.

Rebecca's visit was prolonged four months, and then she returned home only to make preparations for her wedding, and to be married from the house of her step-father.

In less than six months from the day of Sarah Gibson's marriage, she was, one certain evening in February, taking a general oversight of the arrangements of everything, from garret to cellar, in the comfortable and well-furnished, though old-fashioned house in Bridge-street, preparatory to the arrival of the bride. Her own and her husband's presents of the silver tea and coffee pots, were placed on a conspicuous shelf of the parlour cupboard, with the neatly-folded three-cornered billet of congratulation; and her mind was all a flutter of the most extravagant and unealled-for devotion of friendship. "She could defy now," she said to herself, "all the purse-proud, aristocratic people, who held themselves as too select and elevated to visit with her—she defied and despised rank—there was nothing in all the world like love and friendship—a dry crust with a friend was better than a feast with those who were indifferent to her. She loved her Elvira better than all the world, with the exception of her dear

Browne. Gregson," she said, " was a fine, manly fellow, worthy of her friend—she was proud of them, and she would show all the world she was so; and that, although he was a cheese-factor, yet that she considered him a gentleman for all that!" She was quite heroic in her friendship, and rejoiced that there was something which demanded a sacrifice on her part, which would prove the strength of her attachment.

The bride came. The bells that had rung a merry peal to welcome Mr. Browne and his wife, sent forth their metallic voices with a no less merry welcome, announcing to all the gossips of Woodburn, that Mr. and Mrs. Gregson had arrived. Scarcely had the Gregsons time to cast their eyes round the sitting-room, in the cupboard of which they found their friends' presents, and read the note that accompanied them, when Mrs. Browne made her appearance, " being impatient," she said, " to welcome her dear friend to her new home, and to prove the intense delight she felt in witnessing her happiness."

CHAPTER V.

AN ACT OF FRIENDSHIP.

The same set that had visited Mr. and Mrs. Browne, visited also Mr. and Mrs. Gregson. The two young wives dealt at the same shops, and invariably went shopping together; and, by the same rule, Mrs. Browne always looked in on Mrs. Gregson every Wednesday morning, the first thing after breakfast, on her way to the market, and

always found Mrs. Gregson, bonnetted and shawled, waiting for her; and the two, followed by their respective maid-servants, basket in hand, progressed slowly in the market, making purchases; and then down again in their way to the shambles, only deviating from each other in their respective purchases, so as to suit their husbands' tastes. Gregson preferred gooseberry tart to currant; Browne *vice versâ*. Browne would not give a fig for new potatoes, when he could get pease; Gregson said, that potatoes, the year round, were better than pease, unless eaten to ducks; so, unless Mrs. Gregson bought ducks, ten to one she would purchase potatoes, while her friend purchased pease to lamb, or veal, or anything else, and so on: an amiable difference this, which just prevented the unanimity and uniformity of the two friends growing insipid. There was a story, however, current in Woodburn, but, whether true or false, we cannot vouch, of the two young wives having, in the beginning of their career, insisted upon the tables of their respective houses being furnished with precisely the same dishes as the other, thoughout the year; and that a vigorous rebellion on the part of the two husbands ensued, in which the stronger powers had the victory, as was only right in this case, seeing plain good sense was on their side; and that, henceforward, the two ladies agreed to make the needful difference in their husbands' tastes, an additional bond of amity between themselves.

In the important business of dress also, the two husbands exercised a salutary influence. It was all very well, while the one lived at Gloucester,

and the other in Craven, and they had nobody to please but themselves, that they should both dress alike—that both should wear the green silk pelisse, and the chip hat, trimmed with green gauze—both wear the blue silk, and the garnet necklaces—the canary-coloured chambray, or the lavender Norwich-crape. They did not think that what suited the one, might not suit the other; for Miss Gibson was dark and florid, while Miss Wells was fair and pale; but they were satisfied with a reflection, in their eyes far superior to mere taste, that, at one and the same time, both might be walking out in green pelisses, and with gauze upon their chip hats; or, seeing company in blue silk, canary-coloured poplin, or lavender Norwich-crape; but, now that they had the felicity of being dwellers in the same town, this monotony of taste was somewhat interrupted; and beneficially too, by the respective husbands. Gregson could not bear to see his wife in green; "it might suit Mrs. Browne," he said, "but it did not suit her." He liked white muslin, and pink ribbons; and he declared his wife never looked so well as in the peach-blossom taffety he brought her from Nottingham goose-fair, where he had gone to buy cheese, the first autumn after their marriage. Browne, on the contrary, had an exclusive preference for all rich dark colours, clear greens, maroons, purples, and even black. He gave his wife five guineas to buy a dark-blue satin, and declared that, as soon as he could afford it, she should have a crimson velvet.

In this way, with these permitted differences, everything went on in the most amicable manner

possible. On Sundays they called at each other's houses after church, and sate an hour or two together, unless, as it happened now and then, they both chanced to be knocking at each other's doors at the same moment, having missed as they came out of church; in which case, they would both wait, the one for the other, till their patience was fairly worn out, and then have a chance of meeting midway in the street. In the course of the first year, however, Browne, who, like most professional gentlemen, was but an indifferent church-goer, fell, in this respect, into his former bachelor-habits, and was generally deep in his papers, in his undress, when his neighbours were all wending their way to church. To save "dear Mrs. Browne," therefore, the ignominy of going to church all alone, Mr. and Mrs. Gregson took the lawyer's house in their way; which was easy for them to do, seeing it was in Church-street, and escorted his wife to the very pew-door. It was, no doubt, a very edifying sight to all the world of Woodburn, to witness this friendship between the two houses. Many people, the middle-aged especially, declared it could not last; that excess always led to its own destruction, and that it was quite possible to have too much even of a good thing, and so on—illustrating their arguments by established truisms, as middle-aged people are very apt to do. Others again, who might be disposed to visit with the Brownes, but who "cared not a button about the Gregsons," asserted this domestic alliance to be foolish and ridiculous; "for how," said they, "could one spend even an evening with them, without being dragged into

an acquaintance with their friends?" And those who were similarly disposed towards the Gregsons, made precisely the same complaint.

"I like Gregson," some good, respectable father of a family would say; "I have known him ever since a boy. I like his wife very well too; but I've no notion of being compelled into civility to that fellow Browne. I saw too much of him when he lost me my cause!"

All this, however, mattered very little to the allied houses themselves. "The Miranda and Elvira friendship" was in no danger of being weakened by anything which the "well-fed wits" of Woodburn could say; and so we will leave "the everlasting friendship," to talk of other matters.

The fates had decreed Mr. Browne to be the great man of a little town; the elements of such greatness were in him, and his wife was a fitting helpmate. But in life, as in the common every-day affair of climbing a wall, a person, however he may be destined to climb, often needs a shove upwards—a helping hand, just to reach that particular crack, in which the toe may be insinuated, and then he will make the ascent triumphantly by himself. It was just so with James Browne. He kept his eye fixed on the top of the wall; he meant to climb it long enough before he was an old man. He only waited now for the shove upwards; in other words, he was poor—that is, he was poor for a lawyer.

When he married Miss Gibson, the only daughter of the rich grocer of Gloucester, he expected that her large fortune would raise him at once. She

received, however, only one thousand pounds as her marriage portion, and that would do no more than pay certain furniture bills, and keep all straight and handsome till other money came in, or till the old gentleman died.

The whispered surmise among the Gloucester people, that old Gibson was not as rich as had been imagined, was, within the first year of his daughter's marriage, proved to be the fact. He died; and, after all borrowed monies and debts were paid, between three and four hundred pounds alone remained, even though Samford, now married to Miss Jemima Warwick, had paid a considerable sum for the good-will of the business, only a few weeks before the old gentleman's death. It was a terrible surprise to Mr. and Mrs. Browne; and Samford was charged by him with embezzlement, and all kind of malpractices. Samford brought an action for defamation against Browne, and made public the state of the old tradesman's books; by which he most clearly proved, that he had not only honestly served his employer, but actually saved the concern from bankruptcy. He came off not only triumphantly, as far as his character went, but with fifty pounds damages.

All this was the most galling thing that could happen to the Brownes. It was like publishing to the whole world the meagreness of the lady's fortune, as well as her exact connexion with trade; and, as the lawyer himself was known not to be rich, nor to have either a rich or an extensive practice, nothing could be easier than to calculate what might be the amount of his income

"The very children of Woodburn, who have

the least turn for figures, may cast up, on their fingers, how much I am exactly worth!" Such was Mr. Browne's unpleasant observation one certain Saturday evening to his wife, who was sitting with him, and who was looking no better pleased than he.

"But, my dear," said she, "sinking under one's misfortunes does no good! Rise we must, by some means—that's certain!"

"But the deuce of it is," said her husband, "that all this has been made so public!—why, old Mordan fairly laughed in my face to-day!—and there's an end of our getting the house in Wilton-street."

Wilton-street, our readers must know, was the St. James's of Woodburn; and the house of which Mr. Browne now spoke, was one of the aristocratic houses of the place—none but such people, and people of family, had hitherto lived in it; and to live in it would alone confer some degree of distinction. It had now been vacant six months, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown had, during that time, been casting longing looks towards it. Immediately on the death of Mr. Gibson, before the disastrous state of his affairs was known, they resolved to have it, and had even entered into negotiation with the landlord for a long lease; had given notice to leave their humbler house in Church-street, and thus made it known to all the town. It was, therefore, a most mortifying thing, not only to hear the whole town ridiculing the defeated lawyer in his suit with Samford, but also to know that all ideas of inhabiting the great house must be given up, and that for reasons which

everybody must understand—the most unpleasant reasons of all—the not being able to afford it."

"I wish to Heaven the house had never been to let!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne.

"Or that we had never said a word about it to any creature," added her husband

"I never spoke of it to any living soul, excepting dear Rebecca," said Mrs. Browne; "and you know she and Gregson are only like part of our own family."

"It was known all over Woodburn, the first day we spoke of it," returned he; "people congratulated me on the removal: it would be the establishing me at once, everybody said: and that small house adjoining would be turned into offices at such a small expense!" Mr. Browne became quite agitated as he thought of all these desirable considerations which must now, prudence argued, be given up.

"James, dear," said his wife, "if it really would do you so much good in your profession, to live in a better house, and in a better style, why not do it, as a matter of simple policy? It would be worth while even to borrow the money for such a purpose—it would soon clear itself off, you know. And now I have said so much, I will make one confession which I never made before, not even to Rebecca. I *was* surprised at first to find you living in such a third-rate house as this. Everybody knows that people are looked upon just as they seem to estimate themselves. You may depend upon it, James, modesty and timidity are the surest preventions to a man's success in life. It seems," continued she, getting quite warm in her

argument, "as if you thought yourself a very third-rate sort of lawyer, to live in such a house as this! I really do not wonder that nobody visited us; and, what we should have done without Gregson and Rebecca, I'm sure I don't know."

"It is all true—every word—there's no doubt of it," replied Browne; "but then, what can a man do more than he can? It was a bold stroke, let me tell you, for me at first to take even this house. I furnished my office handsomely, and managed any way in the house, for not a soul came near me but Gregson; and I declare, that the handsome Brussels carpet, and my smart fender and fire-irons, and my new desks, and my clerk, who, because he had nothing to do, I set to engross an old act of parliament, in order that he might look busy, set me up at once. There's a deal in what you say; we must give the world its due for their estimate of us."

"And that always is," interrupted Mrs. Browne, "according to the show we make; for the world dearly loves to be dazzled," said she, laughing.

"I *do* believe," said Mr. Browne, "that, if we could get that house in Wilton-street, and look decidedly prosperous, I might command half the county business: just give me a start, and I would snap my fingers any day at Peake and Mordan, although Mordan laughed in my face! I declare I could have knocked the fellow down!"

"It was unpardonable," returned his wife; "but I tell you what, James, we really must take this house; we must manage it some way. Have you no means of raising the money? It would soon be cleared off again, you know."

Browne knit his brows, glanced up to the corner of the room, and declared that he could think of no other way than asking Gregson. Gregson had plenty of money, he said; old Gregson was rich, and his son had been making money since he was one-and-twenty; he dared to say he would lend him some.

"That he will," exclaimed his wife—"I am sure he will; for he is a sensible man, and very much your friend; and, even if he were to make any difficulty about it, Rebecca would persuade him; she would do anything in the world for me!"

It was now, therefore, decided that no stop whatever should be put to the negotiation respecting the good house in Wilton-street. The world of Woodburn should see, they said, that, although Mr. Gibson had not died rich, and although Browne had lost his suit with Samford, yet, that these things could not affect circumstances so flourishing as his. He could afford, in the very face of a loss, to take a large house and live handsomely; the inference, therefore, must be, that his profession alone was making a handsome present income.

Gregson, although he was not much addicted to lending money, made no more objection than even good-natured men commonly make on lending a thousand pounds; which was the sum his friend requested from him. He said something about sureties; on which Browne declared that sureties were out of the question; and if his friend were not satisfied with his own bond, he would at once drop the idea, give up the house in Wilton-street, and stay where he was, although it

was so seriously against his interest to do so: that he was sorry he had asked the favour from anybody, because, although Mr. Gibson's death, contrary to expectation, had produced next to nothing, in one other year's time his own professional returns would have enabled him to make the removal on his own resources, without thanks to anybody; only by that time the house in Wilton-street would have been let, for such houses as that seldom remained long in the market. At this stage of the business Mrs. Gregson came into the room; she knew the subject upon which her husband and Browne were talking, for she had been plied on the same subject by Mrs. Browne; and she was even now returned home, full of the enthusiasm of friendship, impatient even to make a sacrifice for her dear Mrs. Browne's sake; "and especially," said she, "at a moment so interesting to us all; for I have set my mind on Sarah's child being born in Wilton-street. It is a dreary house, that of your's, Mr. Browne,in Church-street; I am sure I would not have said as much before; but it is not exactly the right home either for you or dear Sarah! And I am sure," continued she, "that if either I or Gregson could do anything for you, even at a sacrifice of our own advantage, we ought to do it, seeing how much we owe to you: but there really would be no sacrifice required from us; you would be able to pay us back the money in twelve months, for I am quite sure, when people see you living in that good house, and making such a dash, they will think ten times as well of you, and think you have twenty times the business you have."

There were two particulars in this fluent speech, which fixed the attention of Mr. Gregson: his wife said they were under such obligations to the Brownes: he wondered what all those obligations were, but he did not inquire, of course; the other was, that if their friends seemed to be prosperous, the world would help to make them so, and speedily enable them to return the money. He liked Browne, reasoned he with himself, and their wives were old friends; he himself had money lying unemployed in the bank, which was paying but light interest; Browne offered him five per cent.; there could not, surely, be any great objection to lending it. In short, he yielded.

One thousand pounds was drawn out of the county bank, and handed over to Browne. A note of hand was duly made out and signed, and given in exchange.

The same evening, the lease for the great house in Wilton-street was signed and witnessed. The next morning, Mr. and Mrs. Browne were seen by some of their new neighbours elect, to enter the house like people greatly pleased with possession; and, in the course of the day, white-washing and cleaning began, and great knockings were heard in the adjoining small dwelling, which intimated that workmen had already commenced turning the house into offices for him and his clerks, in readiness for the county business, which was to find its way there. His old masters, Peake and Mordan, lifted up their eyebrows, and looked knowingly out of the corners of their eyes, as if to intimate, that shrewd people like themselves knew what the end of all

this would be; and all the little town of Woodburn blessed itself that it had so fertile a topic of gossipry as the removal of lawyer Browne out of Church-street into the great house in Wilton-street.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAMILY COMPACT.

If you would wish a person to profess himself bound to you by "an eternal debt of gratitude," lend him the money he wants at the very moment he asks for it; in short, do as Gregson did. Whether your friend will not consider the eternal debt of gratitude cancelled by the first hint about the repayment of the money, is quite another thing: that is in the second stage of the business; we are only yet in the first; and Mr. and Mrs. Browne, therefore, not only professed, but sincerely believed, that no other creature living would have done so much for them. Mr. Gregson was, therefore, without exception, the most generous and noble of friends, and, to the latest day of their lives they should never forget his kindness; and that it was owing also, in part, to "dear Rebecca," whom Mrs. Browne declared "she had doted on ever since the day when she first set eyes on her at Miss Wyndham's school."

With such energetic sentiments of gratitude, therefore, how could they better prove their sincerity than by employing the money splendidly in the purpose for which it was lent. "Everybody knows the intimate terms on which the two houses are, and therefore," said Mrs. Browne, with en-

thusiasm, " as we rise in society, as we unquestionably must do in Wilton-street, our friends shall rise with us. I shall be proud to introduce dear Rebecca everywhere. She is very genteel—don't you think her so, Browne?"

" Yes, certainly," returned her husband.

" And I'll tell you what we must certainly do," continued she; " it will be such a handosme way of showing our respect to them; she and Mr. Gregson must be sponsors for our little one: they must indeed! You must drop your idea of your uncle and aunt—they will never do anything for us; and you know I said all along that Rebecca would expect it. And, another thing," exclaimed she, growing quite animated on the subject of her gratitude, " our first boy and girl shall be brought up for each other—shall be educated for each other—you know they do so in some foreign countries, and among the Moravians, and it answers uncommonly well. It is a beautiful notion—two sweet children betrothed in infancy! Rebecca and I have often and often talked of it—and it will be such a delightful bond between us. I am quite charmed with the idea—the children shall be plighted in their very cradles!"

Mr. Browne smiled at his wife's enthusiasm, and declared he should be quite as ready as herself to prove his sense of the obligation; and that he certainly did think the Gregsons ought to be preferred to his uncle and aunt, as sponsors for the child.

" Well, after all," said the people of Woodburn, when they saw how handsomely furnished and prosperous-looking was Mr. Browne's new

house in Wilton-street, "there must be some mistake about the insolvency of Mr. Gibson. Mrs. Browne must have had some fortune, and not a small fortune either, to enable them to make such an alteration in their way of living."

"Depend upon it," said one, "he is getting on in his profession; everybody who has employed him says that he is a long-headed fellow: how cleverly he managed the cause for the parishioners of Wellby, against Sir George Combe, about stopping the Wellby-road!"

"He is just the man to get on," said a second; "he has no objection to *make* a little business for himself occasionally."

"But," argued a third, "this everybody must confess, that, unlike Peake and Mordan, you have some chance with him of getting to the end of a job. They have sadly too much to do; and, to tell you the truth, I have serious thoughts of employing him in all my lesser business; Peake and Mordan seem so careless about minor things"

"Ha! that reminds me," said a fourth speaker—"Browne's landlord, Mr. Willis, has already transferred his business to him: there has been quite a scene between Willis and his old lawyers—something about a deed that was missing. Browne was, you know, in Peake and Mordan's office, and helped their memory as to the hiding-place of this said parchment."

"Indeed!" exclaimed another, "that will be a capital thing for Browne, for Willis can throw a vast of business into his hands; no one more!"

Such was a conversation which took place between a knot of Woodburn gentlemen, as they

stood together upon the bowling-green of the Red Lion Inn, about three months after the Brownes' removal to Wilton-street.

About the same time, three ladies—two spinsters—Miss Carr and Miss Bensley, and old Mrs. Porter, who were waiting the arrival of a fourth, to make up a rubber at whist, held a conversation also on this favourite topic.

"Did you see Mrs. Browne at church on Sunday?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"No," replied both ladies. "But," said Miss Bensley, "I've heard that she was prodigiously grand."

"Really," said Mrs. Porter, "all eyes were turned on her. She was in maroon-coloured velvet, with three such feathers in her hat, as I never saw in my life; and, upon my word, she looked quite handsome!"

"I've heard gentlemen say," remarked Miss Carr, "that she is handsome, but, for my part, I never admired her!"

"How in the world!" asked Miss Bensley, "have they made such a start all at once? They say she had no fortune; her father was only a grocer, you know, and a bankrupt, somebody said; and, as to his profession, it's ridiculous to think of its producing him such an income!"

"I am sure I do not know how it is," replied Mrs. Porter, "but they seem prodigiously well off."

"They cannot be living under a thousand a year," said Miss Carr. "I should think they will drop those everlasting Gregsons now," said she, laughing. "How ridiculous they make themselves!"

"At all events," said Mrs. Porter, "they cannot be charged with forgetting their friends as soon as they begin to hold up their heads in the world!"

"Did you hear of the christening, ladies?" inquired Miss Carr; "it was absolutely absurd!"

"No," said Mrs. Porter; "nor have I seen the baby, but they tell me it is a beautiful child."

Yes," returned Miss Carr, "the child is well enough—but such a christening! Mr. Wilford told me about it—he was at the dinner, and Mr. and Mrs. Gregson were the sponsors. Such ridiculous folly, he said, he never witnessed—such kissing and crying—the ladies embracing—and, la! I don't know what—like a couple of sentimental school-misses—and Mr. Wilford, you know, is not a person to exaggerate."

"Well, that *is* absurd!" remarked Miss Bensley.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, ladies," said Mrs. Robinson, laying down her bonnet, and taking the vacant chair; "but I just met with Mrs. and the Misses Jennings, and they insisted on my walking in, for they had been to call on Mrs. Browne this morning, and they wanted to tell me all about it."

"La!" exclaimed the three ladies at once "have the Jenningses been to call on the Brownes?"

"Yes, indeed!" returned Mrs. Robinson.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Miss Carr.

"And what did they tell you?" asked Miss Bensley.

"Oh, everything was exquisite," returned she, laughing; "and Mrs. Browne was in apple-pie

order;—but would you believe it!—Mr. and Mrs. Sykes Willoughby's card lay conspicuously in a card-basket on the table; and Mrs. Browne was not long before she began to say, "A charming lady is Mrs. Sykes Willoughby; they did us the honour to call the other day!" And then Mr. Browne came in, looking as if his head was full of law-business, and morning-callers were the last thing in his head; but you know, of course, he had been sent for; and presently he dragged in "my excellent friend, Mr. Sykes Willoughby; he and his lady did us the honour to call the other day!" while poor Mrs. Browne looked ready to die, for this spoiled it all, you know; and he was such a fool that, although she kept frowning at him, he would not understand her looks. It was infinitely ridiculous!" said she, laughing; "if you had but seen Harriet Jennings mimicking them, you would have died with laughter!"

"But what in the world made the Jenningses call on them?" asked Miss Carr; "and I declare I will make Mr. Wilford tell Harriet Jennings all about the christening, and the embracing of mamma and god-mamma; it will be just the thing for her!"

"Wonders never will cease, that's certain," returned Mrs. Robinson; "and so you will all say. Mr. John Jennings was persuaded by Mr. Willis to put some law-business—something about manorial rights—into Browne's hands; and they say he has managed the business really cleverly; which so pleased Mr. John Jennings—for the cause had been tried three different terms, and lost each time—that he insisted on his mother and

sisters calling on Mrs. Browne;—you know when people live in the same street, they must be neighbourly."

"That is the mischief of these little towns," said Mrs. Porter.

"He knew that," said Miss Carr, "when he went into Wilton-street; for he has an artful way with him, and ambition enough for a cardinal! I wish, however, that the cheese-factor's lady had been there, when Mrs. Jennings called!"

"She *was* there!" exclaimed Mrs. Robinson, "and that made half the joke; for there was such a ceremony of introduction—'Pray Mrs. Jennings, allow me to introduce to you my dear friend, Mrs. Gregson!—Pray young ladies, let me present to you my beloved friend, Mrs. Gregson!'—and then, when Mrs. Gregson, who, by the bye, has most sense of the two, rose to depart, there was such a shaking of hands, and kissing, and 'When shall we meet again?' and adieus—oh, it was capital! It is as good as a comedy, every bit, to see Harriet Jennings mimic Mrs. Browne!"

These two conversations fully explain the progress of events. Mr. and Mrs. Browne had made a bold stroke for fortune, when they removed into Wilton-street. "Faint heart never wins fair lady," had been used as an illustration of his theory, by Mr. Browne himself; "faint heart never wins good fortune;" and, sure enough, fortune seemed not indifferently well pleased by the bold heart of the Brownes; for, within six months of the time when Mr. Browne sate down in his new private room in his new offices, no less than three out of the twelve japanned deed-boxes which filled up one end

of his office, were conspicuously labelled in gold letters, "John Jennings, Esquire;" "Henry Willis, Esquire;" "Peter Thomas Denby, Esquire." His two clerks were no longer set to engross old acts of parliament, for they had full employment; besides which, he had an articled clerk of his own—no other than the nephew of Peter Thomas Denby, Esquire; and about his own private room there lay such a satisfactory litter of engrossed folios, red tape-tied square packets of parchments, and other professional papers, that there was no occasion to lay anything about for show; while the splashes of ink on the new carpet, and on his new green cloth-covered table, gave evidence of work being done there.

All this was amazingly satisfactory; and Mr. Browne began to hold his head quite as high as either Peake or Mordan, and to think, with himself, that he should live to get the best part of their business out of their hands.

Mrs. Browne was no whit less gratified than her husband; the Sykes Willoughbys, and the Jenningses, the two great families of the town and the neighbourhood, had called upon her; true, the intimacy seemed to pause there; the calls had been punctually returned, but no invitations followed, nor in the course of three months had the calls been repeated. Mrs. Browne, therefore, was fain to make use of one call, and one set of cards, and to hope that the time would come when these events would be like every-day things.

In the meantime, "dear Mrs. Gregson" was in no danger of being forgotten. Many and many a time would her friend say to her, when felici-

tated on their growing good fortune, "But, my sweet friend, we owe all this to you! That's what Browne and I often say; and, I am sure if we had no family of our own, and should be worth millions, we ought to leave every sixpence to you and yours!" But there was a child, which, for the present at least, would prevent any unreasonable expectations in the minds of the Gregsons. The child's christening had made no little talk in Woodburn—for the christening and the house-warming were celebrated by the same dinner, and everything was in accordance with the implied prosperity of the family. What the people of Woodburn said of this great christening, we have already heard.

Mr. Gregson, who, as Browne had said, was a most generous-hearted fellow, rejoiced unfeignedly that his money seemed to be the lucky nest-egg to which his friend could add the golden ones; and he and his wife accepted the office of sponsor, as one of great honour—Mr. and Mrs. Browne promising to stand in the same spiritual relationship towards the first young Gregson that required it; nor was such an event likely to be distant. Furthermore, the mamma apparent, and the mamma expectant, were bent upon a yet closer and dearer family union—the marrying, at some future day, the first son and daughter of the respective families.

The "little husband" was born, and flourishing under the name of Charles Edward, so called after the young Pretender, the songs in whose honour and memory had always been favourites with the "Miranda and Elvira" of the earlier part of our

history. Charles Edward, or "Bonnie Prince Charlie," as his mother invariably called him, was the plighted husband of the first Miss Gregson that should be born to the family in Bridge-street. Never had any romantic scheme, in the days of their early friendship, been so fostered and fondled with as this. It was the unceasing topic of conversation and castle-building, when the ladies met, and the subject likewise of many an epistle, dispatched on the days when it was not convenient for them to meet. The same system of education, from the cradle upwards, was to be pursued in both cases. They were to be carried out together, and then to walk out together, hand in hand; to exchange presents of toys and sweetmeats; to be drawn in the same little carriage; to call each other "little husband," and "little wife," and to have no ideas, all the days of their lives, in which each other should not be blended. The ladies exchanged rings, as tokens of their troth to each other; and Mrs. Gregson, beyond her present in character of godmother, presented her young son-in-law elect with a silver drinking cup, made to order, on which were engraved the united initials of Charles Edward Browne and Lucy Gregson, such being the name the young lady was to bear when she made her appearance; and underneath was richly chased a pair of billing doves—"a very pretty conceit," said both Mrs. Browne and Mrs. Gregson, although, we must confess, it was by no means an original one. Nor was this solemn league and covenant entered into without the due consent and accordance of the respective fathers. Both declared themselves perfectly agree-

able, provided the consent of the parties more immediately concerned should be obtained some twenty years thereafter. There was no doubt about that, the mothers declared. And, on the night of the christening, the rest of the company being gone, they insisted upon Mr. Browne drawing up marriage-articles, in the names of the two children, and a bond also between the respective parents, binding them to throw no impediments in the way of such a union, but, on the contrary, to further it by every means in their power. Two copies of this being signed in the presence of witnesses, by the respective parties, each mother took one into her own keeping, declaring she should only be perfectly happy when she saw that bond ratified, by the happy union of their children.

It was well that all this signing and sealing was done after the guests had left the house, or Mr. Wilford would have been able to have embellished his christening narrative with yet richer material for the display of Harriet Jennings' comic powers.

CHAPTER VII.

BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE AND HIS WIFE.

THE first child that was born to the Gregsons was a boy; so was the second; the third occasion presented twins, and both again boys. It was very disappointing, but still not without its consolation; for the little daughter, when she did come, would be all the more suitable in age for the

"Bonnie Prince Charlie," who, it seemed probable, would be the only descendant of the Brownes.

Prince Charlie deserved to be called "Bonnie." Mrs. Jennings, and her witty daughter, Harriet; Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, and even Miss Carr, who always declared that she could endure none of the Brownes, all and each of them allowed that Bonnie Prince Charlie was the handsomest child in Woodburn.

At length, when he was in his fifth year, his little wife-elect was born, and, as had been so long before decreed, was christened Lucy—Mr. and Mrs. Browne standing sponsors, and endowing her with christening cap and robe, silver knife, fork, and spoon, and coral and silver bells the best money could buy. Perhaps our readers wonder, as we are greatly disposed to wonder ourselves, that, in five years' time, the *Family Compact* had not been broken. It happened, however, that neither the Jenningses, nor the Sykes Willoughbys, nor any first-rate town or country people, had yet grown intimate with the Brownes; so that no rival had stepped between the friends, nor had any new friends as yet taken the place of the old. Mr. Browne's profession, however, was producing every year a larger return; he was growing quickly and surely into repute as a lawyer, and the whole twelve boxes which the office contained, and even others out of sight, were now, every one of them, gold-lettered and padlocked, and contained deeds and writings of so many estates and families. Peake and Mordan had began now to sink old animosities, and had legal consultations with him, even of their own

especial desire. He had, moreover, three hired clerks and three articled ones, all gentlemen's sons, each sitting at their respective desks, while he himself was always busy, and needed not now to make the most of his papers to produce effect, for nobody questioned now whether he was prosperous or not. Mr. Gregson said that he was a long-headed, far-seeing man, and knew exactly when to take fortune at the high tide; he must be making now his two thousand a-year; he wondered when he would think of paying the one thousand pounds which he had borrowed nearly six years before! Mrs. Gregson always grew uneasy when this borrowed money was spoken of; for, although Mrs. Browne was her dear and sworn friend, she could not help thinking it the oddest thing in the world that her husband never thought of paying it. But, though she might think this, she did not like Mr. Gregson to have the same freedom of thought. Sometimes, however, he thrust the unpleasant topic upon her, which she would parry thus:—"They could not think of asking the Brownes for it—that was out of the question! and, thank Heaven, they did not want it; besides, as Lucy and Charlie were to be married, it would never signify; it might be reckoned as a part of her portion laid out for her interest; "and what a good match it will be for our sweet little pet!" she would say. "You see, Charles will be the only child, and dear Sarah told me the other day, that Browne was in treaty for his house; and I expect, before he dies he will be immensely rich—lawyers have such opportunities of buying estates and fine places cheap!"

To all which her husband would reply, "We shall see in time, but there is many a slip between the cup and the lip; and you must remember that, although Browne has one child, we have five, and four of them boys, and who want providing for; and people in trade, like me, do not like a thousand pounds lying merely at dead interest."

Mr. Gregson, however, did not ask for his money, and all went on smoothly.

Little Lucy Gregson was brought up on the same system, physical, moral, and intellectual, which had formed the nursery code of the "Bonnie Prince Charlie." She was bathed in cold water from head to foot every morning, winter and summer; she slept upon a hair mattrass, and was drilled as soon as she could walk. She was made to put by half of all her sweetmeats, comfits, barleysugar, and buns, for her little husband; for every doll that was given to her, a horse or whip was given to him; three mornings in a week, the nurse-maids walked together, making "Bonnie Prince Charlie" take hold of the hand of "his little wife," and conduct her along; and three evenings in every week likewise, they spent together in play. It not unfrequently happened that the "Bonnie Prince" was wayward, and would not patronise his little wife—perhaps would quarrel with her, and pinch her black and blue—for it is the vainest attempt in the world to compel or control the affections of a child; or little Lucy would kick and scream, when ordered to kiss her "little husband," and would give the most decided preference to her own brothers. On such

untoward occasions, no pains were spared by either mammas or nurses to effect a reconciliation and preference, generally with entire want of success, until even at length a total breach has existed between the parties-matrimonial; the Prince has beaten his wife, and she has returned his ill-will with the united energy of little foot and doubled fist. Then came the after work of pacification. Miss Lucy carried the sponge-cake to the Bonnie Prince, carefully wrapped up, however, that it might not be seen by her, with her mamma's love, and a kiss which she herself was to bestow; and in return she received the wax-doll, or the pretty basket, which his mamma assured her the Bonnie Prince Charlie had bought that very morning with his own money.

The ivory counters, from which he had learned his letters, had been put by for her use; so had "his pretty picture-books;" and the two children were bribed by their mammas to sit down together on the hearth-rug, that he might teach and she learn; "for," said Mrs. Gregson, "it will be so sweet, that even her earliest remembrance of books should be connected with him!"

Everybody in Woodburn knew by this time that the two children were affianced to each other, and infinite was the jesting and merriment which the circumstance occasioned. But little of all this, however, came to the knowledge of the two ladies themselves, for, as yet, they visited only with their own set, and there, whatever they thought it right to do, was considered not only respectable, but proper; and, beside this, they had still all that romantic heroism of friendship

which took pride in suffering together, or for the same cause, even had they known all that was said of them. Still, difficulties and vexations did, and would occur; nursery-maids quarrelled and tittle-tattled, and would have sown the seeds of death in any friendship less heroic than that of their mistresses; but the most serious cause of annoyance was from the two little people themselves.

By the time Bonnie Prince Charlie was ten years old, he had vowed all kind of hatred to, and rebellion against his poor little wife. He had unfortunately began to associate with young gentlemen of his own age, and among them he had not only found himself ridiculed for his royal appellation, but still more, on account of his little *sposa* He therefore announced to his mamma, in very plain terms, that he hated Lucy Gregson, and would never speak to her again as long as he lived! That he wished she would not talk so much about "little husband" and "little wife," for, that the boys in the street shouted after him; and, moreover, John Porter and Harry Robinson had made a song about him, which Miss Harriet Jennings had set to music; and that, therefore, he would hide himself whenever Mrs. Gregson or Lucy came to the house; and he was very glad indeed that he was going to school, because then he should be quite out of the way of any of them!

Mrs. Browne could hardly believe her own ears, and was quite shocked at her son's obduracy; but he was an only son, and had long since learned that there were few points he could not gain if he were determined; so he was only the more resolute and violent, in proportion to his mother's resistance.

Similar causes of annoyance sprang up also in the path of Mrs. Gregson.

"It's no manner of use, ma'am," said Lucy's nurse-maid, on one particular day, to her mistress, "my trying to dress Miss Lucy; there she lies, all her length, kicking and screaming, on the nursery-floor, all about going to Mrs. Browne's. And I'm sure, ma'am, if I might speak my mind, I never would aforce her, for the Bonnie Prince nipped a piece out of her with his thumb and finger nail, only the last Saturday we were there; and it a'most threw her into fits to hear his name. I'm sure, ma'am, he's a sad ruffianly boy; and, if you only knowed what I know, you'd never think of him for our little dear's husband—bless her heart—for she's too good for twenty such as he."

"Nonsense!" replied Mrs. Gregson, quite offended at the liberty taken by her handmaiden in this implied censure; "Nonsense! you manage Miss Lucy very badly; but go to her, she must not be screaming thus—she will rouse the whole neighbourhood! She shall go with me to Mrs. Browne's to-morrow."

On the morrow the little Lucy was dressed all in her best, and promised a walk with mamma, not a word being said, however, on the intended call on the Brownes. She was taken first to two different houses, put into very good humour by compliments and cakes, and then decoyed by a back street to the very front-door. No sooner did the hated three large steps and the mahogany door present themselves, than the child, who had been merrily talking, and in the height of good humour the moment before, began to scream and

kick, and show such determined resistance, as brought all the grand neighbours to their windows, and almost threw the mother into fits.

"Be still, naughty child," said she, shaking her violently by the arm, and knocking at the door at the same moment; "be still, or I will whip you!"

Mrs. Browne's servants were deaf, or out of the way, for none answered the door; and, who should come up at the very moment, but Mrs. Jennings and her witty daughter, and Miss Carr, who all glanced at the perturbed countenance of Mrs. Gregson and her outrageous daughter, with ill-suppressed mirth. Mrs. Gregson knocked yet louder, and in half a minute more was admitted, when, vexed and mortified beyond measure, she burst into tears. Mrs. Browne did everything in her power to calm her agitated feelings; and the little Lucy being assured that the Bonnie Prince Charlie was not at home, nor should come into her presence, was persuaded to sit down on a little footstool in the drawing-room, although she resolutely refused to accept either plum-cake or fig, from her mother-in-law-elect. Poor child! she had been bribed and deceived so often, that she had no faith in any of them.

Bonnie Prince Charlie was sent to school in a neighbouring town. It was a happy day both to him and his little wife, when they kissed and parted. The *parting*, however, was the only portion of the affair which had their own free good-will; to kiss, they were persuaded, on the plea that "they would not see one another, nobody could say when!"

When the Bonnie Prince returned home for the holidays, he had, even in the first half-year's term, imbibed enough of the school-boy spirit, to maintain his own will, "in spite of his mother, or any woman whatever;" and he failed not to make it a main object to affront Mrs. Gregson herself. The first time, also, he met with his little wife, he set himself about being "as disagreeable as possible." This being in the presence of her brothers —the eldest of whom was about his own age— they took up the quarrel warmly, and all were at feud with him. On the second time of meeting, things grew worse; George Gregson, the second brother, and he, had a fight, in which he was victor. The next time they were together, Tom, the elder, fell upon him, in the double cause of having ill-used his sister, and fought with a boy so much less than himself. The Bonnie Prince went home soundly beaten, and full of all uncharitableness to every one of the family, declaring that, "when the Gregsons came to his school," as was talked of, "he'd pay them off—that he would!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHANGES WILL COME.

Mrs. Browne was sitting one morning in her drawing-room, handsomely dressed, and stout and comely—for she had unquestionably improved in appearance as she had increased in years and wealth—and was now a fine-looking woman, about thirty in appearance, though at least seven years

older. The good house in Wilton-street was now their own, and Mr. Browne was, without a doubt, the first lawyer in that division of the county. He had now ceased to think of the time when his position in society or his fortune were doubtful. The rival firm of Peake and Mordan had ceased to be formidable. Peake was dead, and Mordan had sunk into comparative insignificance.

Mrs. Browne was thinking, on this particular morning, how respectable it looked to have a well made footman in new handsome livery to wait upon one, and to open the door when anybody knocked. She hoped somebody particular would call this morning; it was a thousand pities that the Sykes Willoughbys had called yesterday; she wished the Jenningses were come back from Bath, for Mrs. Jennings' livery was nothing to compare to theirs. How well it would look, too, to send the Bonnie Prince to school, driven by this new servant—for he enacted groom as well as footman—all his schoolfellows, and the masters and all, would think so much better of him. It was so much handsomer, she thought, than to go there in one gig—the father and his two boys, as the Gregsons did. She must confess that the Gregsons were rather common sort of people, and had very common notions about many things: but then, to be sure, Rebecca had not had the advantages which she had had; there was so much in being the wife of a professional man—that she knew years ago, when she refused Samford—for professional men are always gentlemen. She remembered now, perfectly, how vulgar she had thought Gregson when she first knew him. Rebecca might

have been different, if she had married a different sort of person; then there were so many children —that alone made a wonderful difference; for her part, she thought crowds of children were vulgar—she was most happy in having but one; yet, spite of the children, if she were in Rebecca's place, she was sure she could manage better; she would not be contented with things in such a tradesman-like manner—dining at one—taking tea at six—it really was so vulgar; and, if it were only out of compliment to her, they might alter their hours; for she never knew when to call, without interfering with some meal. If Mrs. Gregson, however, had only half as many callers as she had, and that kind of people too, she would be compelled to alter them. Then, again, she wished Rebecca would have done with that everlasting brown silk gown, and that scarlet shawl, and would dress altogether with more style; for she, with all her love for her friend, could not resist certain feelings of shame and annoyance, when her great acquaintance, the Sykes Willoughbys, or the Jenningses, caught Mrs. Gregson in her drawing-room. She had, it is true, ventured to say something to her on the subject of her dress; but then, poor Mrs. Gregson had looked so hurt, and had said something too, all in confidence, about her husband's losses in trade, and the money it cost to keep the boys at school;—that she was obliged to study economy; and that she would rather by far go shabby herself, than that little Lucy should, who was designed for Prince Charlie's wife. Oh, it was rather ridiculous and inconsiderate, Mrs. Browne could not but confess, to have ever

thought of marrying her son to Mr. Gregson's daughter. She had not taken into consideration, in those former years of their friendship, how very different their station in society would be, and that their son, an only child—a gentleman every inch of him—was never likely to marry a cheese-factor's daughter! No, indeed, he would marry, she had no doubt, into a family as good as the Sykes Willoughbys!

At the very moment when Mrs. Brown's reflections had arrived at this ultimatum, the door of the drawing-room was thrown open in the most unexceptionable manner, and the footman, in his new livery, announced "Mrs. Gregson." Mrs. Browne rose with almost a start, yet she assumed a manner of unwonted courtesy, to hide the treason that was lurking in her soul.

"Dearest Rebecca," exclaimed she, kissing her, "you are just the person I wanted! I have been thinking of you all the morning! How are the dear children—and my sweet little Lucy—and Mr. Gregson?"

"Quite well, thank you, dear," returned Mrs. Gregson; "but you've got a new servant, I see—is Martin gone?"

"No," replied Mrs. Browne, "but we have so many morning callers, that a man-servant seemed almost necessary; and Browne wished to give some dinner-parties, and we should have been obliged to hire a man, and that, you know, never looks well; so, altogether, we thought we had better keep one of our own—the expense is no object at all—and Brown insisted upon my keeping Martin as my own maid; she has such

nice manners, and such an exeellent method of getting up lace and muslin—I declare she always irons Browne's shirts—he is very particular about his shirts, you know."

"It is a fine thing to be you," returned Mrs. Gregson.

"Bless me, you are not envious!" exclaimed her friend, smiling.

"Oh dear, no!" said Mrs. Gregson, "I am sure, I rejoice that things have gone so well with you. But, do you know," added she, "who are the new people that are come to Moreby Lodge?—you know there was a great mystery about it."

"No, indeed; I never could learn," said Mrs. Browne.

"You shall guess," said her friend, looking very well pleased; "I am sure you will never guess, though!—I never was so surprised in all my life."

Mrs. Browne guessed and guessed again, but could not guess aright.

"I'll tell you," said Mrs. Gregson: "Anne Ward and her husband—only think—our own old Anne Ward of the Wyndham House days!"

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne.

"I knew I should," returned her friend. "Don't you remember, a dozen years ago, or more, my telling you that she had written to me, saying she was going to India? She and I were great friends after you left school. Bless me! only to think of those old times—the Miranda and Elvira days! and Mrs. Gregson clasped her hands, and laughed.

Mrs. Browne looked a good deal annoyed, and her friend resumed:—

"Anne Ward and I were very good friends: I liked her very much; and she wrote to say she was going to India; that was very soon after I was married—it must be fifteen years ago; and, two years afterwards, she sent me a long letter, and that pretty India box."

"Yes, I remember," said Mrs. Browne.

"I heard no more of her," continued Mrs. Gregson—"not one syllable, whether she was dead or alive, till last night; and then, a very handsome carriage drove up to the door with a lady in it. She sent in her card—Mrs. Barwell. I could not conceive who she was; the servant said his lady supposed I did not know the name, but she begged I would see her. Of course, I said I should be most happy; and in she came. I was sitting at my work with Lucy and the two boys; but I could not for my life recall the face, nor conceive who she was: she held my hand, and looked fixedly and pleasantly into my face, and seemed quite to enjoy my perplexity. At last, I said, "Is it Anne Ward?" and then she burst out laughing, just as she used to do. "And now, sit down," said she, for I have ordered the carriage away; and I am going to take tea with you, and talk over old times." "But, have you dined?" I asked; for, as I had cold fowl, and tongue, and cheesecakes in the house, I knew I could offer her a nice little dinner. "Yes," she said, "I dined at one o'clock to-day, for they told me you kept early hours; and I am come to take tea with you, and to have a long evening, and to talk over old times."

"It was very friendly and considerate of her,"

said Mrs. Browne; "but did she know that I was living here?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gregson, "she knew that before I told her; but she and I, you know, were at school together nearly two years after you left, and were very good friends. I am sure, I was quite affected by her remembrance of me!"

Mrs. Browne made up her mind that she would call upon her the very next morning, and was rejoiced to think of the servant in livery, who would drive her. "I'm sure, my dear Rebecca," said she, rather bitterly, "you must have done with this old brown silk, and this old shawl, now that carriage-people come to visit you! and I hope Nancy was neat, and had a clean apron on when she went to the door; people used to well-appointed establishments, and well-dressed servants, notice these things so much; and I am sure, Nancy need not go so slovenly as she does. But, dear me! I did not mean to hurt you," said she, seeing the colour mount to Mrs. Gregson's brow, with an expression of mortification on her countenance; "I only said it out of friendship; but I know that people used to fine establishments perceive these things so soon; and the Barwells must be very rich, for, what a fine place they have made of the Lodge! and I hear they keep three men-servants!"

Mrs. Gregson made no reply, but looked as if something were labouring in her mind. Mrs. Browne thought so too. "I'm sure, Rebecca, I'm very sorry if I have given you pain; but I meant it only in kindness. I have often wished to mention the subject to you. Nancy *is* hardly

respectable; and, you know, other people may talk, but they never could mention it to you."

"I am not thinking about that, Sarah," returned Mrs. Gregson. "We cannot afford to keep footmen in livery; a female servant must do for us: but I was coming up to-day, even if I had not come to tell you about Anne Ward, to mention something else, which, I am sure, has made me quite wretched of late; and, I really think, neither Mr. Browne nor yourself should have occasioned the necessity for it."

"Bless me! what do you mean?" asked the other; "you quite frighten me!"

"I mean the money Gregson lent to Mr. Browne, years ago."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Browne.

"I am sure it has made me quite unhappy of late," continued Mrs. Gregson. "Gregson has lost a deal of money in business—of course, this is said in confidence to you—it quite affects his spirits, and, I fear, his health also; and nothing but absolute necessity would have induced me to mention it; but he threatened, if I would not, then he would; and men, you know, want delicacy about these things. I was so afraid he might say anything to hurt either you or Mr. Browne's feelings; for I told him all along I was sure it had slipped your memories."

"You are very good!" said Mrs. Browne; but in a voice that seemed to express the very opposite of her words.

"Then, may I tell Gregson that you will mention it to Mr. Browne?" asked the other.

"Certainly," replied she, but in the coldest possible voice.

"And now, dear Sarah," again began Mrs. Gregson, who was wounded by the tone of voice, more than by the words, "as I am on disagreeable subjects, let me say one word on another matter, which has caused me more pain of mind than you can conceive."

"For Heaven's sake!" said Mrs. Browne, "only one unpleasant subject at a time, if you please!"

"No, Sarah!" returned Mrs. Gregson, "it shall not be left till another time. I will speak it; you know what I mean, for you must yourself be conscious of it!"

"Of what?" asked Mrs. Browne.

"Of coldness and indifference," replied she; "of not having the same regard for me that you used to have. And oh, Sarah, if you really said what old Mrs. Robinson has told everybody that you said—that you thought my Lucy badly managed, and my boys so rude, that you would not let dear Charlie come near them—it was unkind!—it was cruel!—it was what I never deserved! nor could I have said it of you and yours, even if I had thought it fifty times the truth!" And poor Mrs. Gregson, fairly overcome by her sense of the injury, burst into violent tears.

"She's a gossipping old woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne; "and pray, Rebecca, do not thus give way to your feelings; remember you will have to walk through the town, and everybody will see you; and, I protest, I never said one word against dear Lucy. I may have said that

Tom and George were rude; but, bless me! that's no more than I have said of my own son hundreds of times! Oh dear! now there's a knock at the hall door! Do, pray, go into my bed-room, and wash your face! you'll find Martin there; and tell her to give you a glass of wine!"

So saying, Mrs. Browne hurried her poor friend out of the drawing-room, just before the new footman brought up a party of fine ladies. Mrs. Gregson stood on the second flight, just long enough to let the drawing-room door be closed, and the footman out of sight, and then, without entering the bed-room, or encountering Martin, whom she greatly disliked, she smothered her feelings, both of pride and sorrow, as well as she could, and let herself out of the house, right glad that the fine new footman was no where to be seen.

The disparaging thoughts which had been occupying Mrs. Browne's mind, before Mrs. Gregson made her appearance, were no way weakened by the visit she had just paid. The brown silk gown, and the red shawl, looked even shabbier in her eyes than ever; "and if it indeed were," reasoned she, "as Mrs. Gregson hinted, that their circumstances were unprosperous, how little to be desired was her acquaintance, in many ways." Their new friends, all gay and wealthy, would not like to meet the shabby figure and dismal countenance of poor Mrs. Gregson about the place. Mrs. Gregson did not get stouter as she got older; and really, her friend protested, she began to look quite like the old woman! Then, turning to another branch of the subject, she still cogitated on: "It was so strange that Anne Ward, now

the wife of the rich India Colonel Barwell, of Moreby Lodge, should go in that familiar sort of way to call upon her; and yet, what was this but a proof that she knew her to be low in the world? She never would have called on me," said she, "in that style! No, no, it was plain enough that she knew the true manners of the world; people holding such a position in society as the Brownes, would call on the new comers—such as the Gregsons could not have volunteered their acquaintance to the Barwells; Mrs. Barwell evidently wished to set the poor friend at ease, and would wait to be called on by the rich one!"

The flattering unction being thus laid to her soul, she was quite easy on the subject of the Barwells, and then turned her thoughts to that part of her friend's communication, which was most annoying of all—the borrowed money. She must mention it to her husband—there was no doubt of that; but she knew very well, that, although everything was going on in wordly matters to their hearts' content, and that there was no want of money for any purpose, either for ease or pleasure, nor yet for the purchase of houses or lands, still, it was another thing to raise a thousand pounds, and pay it down for no visible return: they would seem to be a thousand pounds poorer, when this money was paid to Gregson. She devoutly wished they never had had it; for "Browne," said she, "*must and would* have made his way, spite of any impediment; and, I am sure we over-estimated the favour at the time. We have always thought quite too much of the Gregsons; and, if it had

not been for this horrid money, we ought to have dropped them years ago!"

With this sense of duty strong upon her, she at that moment opened the drawing-room door for her husband, whose step she heard on the stairs.

"Mrs. Gregson has just been here," said she, "the moment he entered; and what do you think she came about?"

Her husband could not tell.

"She says," replied Mrs. Browne, "that their circumstances are very bad; and so I can believe, for she looks, and has looked a long time, dreadfully shabby! and she says they must have the money!"

"He has been with me about it," said Browne, looking angry and annoyed; "it is a great shame that he should want money—people always supposed that he was making a property."

"It's really too bad!" exclaimed his wife; "and what shall you do?"

"Do!" repeated Browne, "require six months' notice, to be sure, and pay it in!—It's folly talking of paying a thousand pounds at a day's notice—so I told him! But what I came at this moment about was, to tell you that Mr. Sykes Willoughby will take luncheon here to-morrow at one; and I wish you to get some cream cheese —I heard him say he was fond of it—and let everything be handsome!"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Browne; "but I do not know where to get the cream cheese."

"You *must* get it!" returned her husband; "if it costs five pounds, it must be had!"

Mrs. Browne having assured her husband that it should be had if money could obtain it, made him listen to the strange history of the new residents at Moreby Lodge, and of Mrs. Barwell's visit to Mrs. Gregson.

"You see," said she, "all this was done out of consideration to their humble circumstances: she waits now for me to call upon her. Mrs. Gregson never could have volunteered her friendship to people living at Moreby Lodge."

Mr. Browne approved of, and acquiesced in, all his wife said; and wished her to pay her respects to the Barwells, without fail, the moment after Mr. Sykes Willoughby had lunched there, the next day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW FRIEND.

Mr. Sykes Willoughby lunched with the Brownes the next day—cream-cheese being on the table, of which the important gentleman partook, commending it even to Mr. Browne's satisfaction.

All this being so happily dismissed, Mrs. Browne, driven by the new, well-appointed manservant, in the handsome gig, went to make her call upon the new lady of Moreby Lodge. Moreby Lodge was one of those grand places with an humble name; any one who had heard it merely mentioned might have imagined it an unostentatious

cottage or villa, but seeing it, they would eagerly have asked, "What splendid mansion is that?" The very fact of living at Moreby Lodge was a guarantee for fortune and rank; the Sykes Willoughby's place, although pompously designated as "Castle Willoughby," was not so good a house. It was a very satisfactory thing, therefore, to Mrs. Browne, to be driving up the beautiful grounds, with the feeling that she should be as intimate at Moreby Lodge as if it were her own place—that no doubt she should be staying there a month at a time, and Charlie would be invited to shoot there;—it was certainly a most agreeable thing to have rich and great friends!"

Mrs. Browne was commissioned by her husband with his card, and the handsomest apology for not accompanying her, on the plea of important business with Mr. Sykes Willoughby; but that, at the earliest moment he could steal from his professional engagements, he would have the honour of paying his compliments to Colonel and Mrs. Barwell.

All Woodburn had talked of the improvements at Moreby Lodge; but Mrs. Browne was hardly prepared for the display of wealth and taste, both within and without, which she discovered.

"It was strange," she thought, as she sate in the drawing-room, waiting for the appearance of the lady of the house, "how the mistress of a place like this, should seek out, and almost, as it were, fly to the arms of a cheese-factor's wife! There must be something innately vulgar in her tastes; and it must have been certainly without the knowledge of the Colonel that it was done!"

So reasoned she, till Mrs. Barwell entered the room. Mrs. Gregson might well say, it was difficult to recognise in her the Anne Ward of the Wyndham House days. She was tall, and nobly formed, although, from the effect of climate, looking older than her real age, and was exquisitely dressed; with manners of the utmost self-possession, and quiet dignity. Revulsions of feeling may be as instantaneous as lightning; and Mrs. Browne, who, the moment before, had wrought herself up into a spirit of contempt, felt immediately the most resolute determination to become her intimate friend—to transfer to her the friendship which had for so many years been the property of Mrs. Gregson.

The joyous confidential meeting which Mrs. Gregson had described as taking place between herself and Mrs. Barwell, was evidently not designed to be repeated; the lady was cordial, but no more. Mrs. Browne enacted raptures, and professed inexpressible delight, and introduced the memory of old times, and Wyndham House; but it would not take. Mrs. Barwell was cool and measured in all her expressions; she was no way inclined to overstep the bounds of the utmost propriety. It was the most provoking thing in the world! She then ventured upon another topic, "dear Rebecca," as she called her, hoping to have struck a sympathetic chord.

"Yes," said Mrs. Barwell, "Mrs. Gregson seems most happily married."

"Mr. Gregson has always been reckoned rich," returned Mrs. Browne.

"What an air of comfort there is throughout

the house!" said Mrs. Barwell, at once kindling into animation—"real substantial comfort—not show. It did my heart good to see her, and those sweet children. I saw only three, however, the two younger boys and Lucy. I must have Lucy to stay with me here, for I love children! I subscribe with all my heart to what the good German professed, 'Love for Jesus Christ and little children!'"

"Lucy is a very pretty girl!" said Mrs. Browne, quite annoyed and amazed by these extraordinary observations; "but Mrs. Gregson spoils her children."

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Barwell, coolly: "that she loves them dearly, and indulges them more than many systematic mammas deem prudent, may be the ease; but *spoiled* they certainly did not seem to me; for children with milder manners, or more gentle, intelligent countenances, I have rarely seen."

"No, certainly," replied the discomfited Mrs. Browne.

"And her husband," continued Mrs. Barwell, "there is a frank, cordial expression about him, that won my heart. I should pronounce him a good man in every relation of life, merely from the tone of his voice. It really did me good to see that household."

"But," said Mrs. Browne, "they belong to a very subordinate class; people of any standing in society would not visit with them; they want that polish of manner, that *je ne sais quoi* which distinguishes people of fashion—or education, perhaps, I should rather say."

"I often question," said Mrs. Barwell, "whether their's is not the class of society, however, in which true happiness is most generally found. They, as individuals, are far more independent than persons of fashion—of our own class, Mrs. Browne."

Mrs. Browne acknowledged this last remark as a compliment.

"There is," continued Mrs. Barwell, "in our own class, so much sacrifice to convention;—this must not be done, or that must not be done—not because it is wrong, but because it is not customary for people of a certain rank to do so, and *vice versâ*. You must rise, and go to bed, and take your meals, according to certain rules which fashion has prescribed; you must ride, when, perhaps, you would rather walk; you must be in London just when you would rather be in the country; you must go to this place of amusement, although it may be no amusement to you; and you must not go somewhere else, although it would delight you beyond everything; you must not visit with such and such people, however amiable, and clever, and good they may be, because they dine in the middle of the day, or keep no man-servant, or purchase fewer or less expensive dresses in the course of the year than would be reckoned the stylish number."

"Not so arbitrary as that!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne.

"The spirit which governs the higher grade of the middle classes, in their intercourse with each other," said Mrs. Barwell, "is certainly as arbitrary."

"But," said Mrs. Browne, "you, at least, are not bound by these rigorous laws."

"Not entirely, thank God!" returned Mrs. Barwell, with animation. "I have, fortunately, a very sensible man for my husband, and who allows me to do just as I please; and I exercise considerable independence of judgment: but, my dear Mrs. Browne," said she, smiling, "you will not convince me that the *haut-ton* of Woodburn will not be greatly shocked and scandalized that I made a familiar call on the wife of a cheese-factor; they will set me down either as decidedly vulgar, or as a mad-woman."

"I must confess," began Mrs. Browne, and then hesitated, not knowing whether it was prudent, with so eccentric a lady, to speak her mind fully.

"Yes, I know what you would say," said Mrs. Barwell; "and, though I should not consider myself accountable to everybody for the common exercise of my free will, I will tell you candidly why I did so. We were girls at school together—that you know. I was poor, and a day-scholar; Rebecca Wells, now Mrs. Gregson, had known some early sorrows of her own, and she was kind to me—very kind, and, I believe, sincerely loved me; she must have told you, for you were sworn friends—"the Miranda and Elvira," said she, laughing: "what a warm friendship we struck up after you left!"

"No," said Mrs. Browne—who felt angry to think that she had not known all her friend's secrets—"I never heard of it!"

"Nevertheless," said Mrs Barwell, "we were

dear friends, and it was a great sorrow to me when she left. My youth was made up of bright lights and deep shades: my first great sorrow was losing my parents; my great happiness was to live seven years with an uncle and aunt; then came a shade again, and I lived with my grandmother: when you knew me, she was, unhappily, infirm both in health and temper, and the discomforts of that part of my life were great; she was poor and proud; my education was the result of a legacy, left by my uncle for that express purpose. What did I not owe to that uncle and aunt!" There was a slight tremor in Mrs. Barwell's voice, but she continued:—"My uncle and aunt dealt in tea—yes, Mrs. Browne, I assure you they kept a shop—a little commission-shop, which produced them but a small income. I lived with them seven years from the time when I was five years old. It was a golden time—I do not believe there was one shade upon it! I shall never forget the happy, kind countenances of my uncle and aunt; the little shop, and all the neat little packets of tea sealed up ready for customers; and the neat little back parlour, and the tea-table at which we three sat; and how I used to run out to help the customers when we were at meals, to save my uncle the trouble—for I loved him dearly! I declare, I have a foolish fancy for all little tea-shops, to this very day. Then, I remember the holidays that came now and then; and the joy it was when Christmas-day fell on a Saturday or Monday, and the shop was closed for two whole days together, and we could thus extend a pleasure—even stop out all night;

and my good uncle used to laugh, and say what a fine thing it must be to be a gentleman, and lead a life of Sundays! Bless me!" said Mrs. Barwell, now really wiping her eyes, "I am quite a child when I think of these things! And then, in summer, when a cousin came over for a week, to manage the shop, and we all set off in a post-chaise somewhere—often to the sea side; and then, no children just let loose from school, were happier than we! How we used to pick up shells; and write our names on the firm sand, and watch till the tide washed them out; and bathe in the sea, and come home so hungry; and make acquaintance with our fellow-lodgers; and even set off on an excursion in a spring-cart, hired for the day—for we were anything but aristocratic in those days! How often have I thought of those things!"

Mrs. Barwell paused; her auditor made no remark, for she thought her the oddest person she had ever known; and presently Mrs. Barwell resumed.

"I assure you, when I was in India, and my fortune had changed so completely, I never thought of those times or persons with shame or disgust; and I determined, that when I came back to England I would throw myself, once more, among the middle classes, and witness, at least, such happiness as I enjoyed in my youth. I loved Rebecca Wells. I knew that she had married one of her own class; she had written to me, and told me of her husband and her children; and when we indeed returned to England, and all the island was before us to choose from, and the Colonel

most generously gave me leave to please myself, I came down here, found this pretty place on sale, which our solicitor in London purchased for us, and here we now are; nor was it till two days ago I saw Mrs. Gregson, for I determined not to apprize her of our coming, that I might witness her pleasure. Nor was her pleasure inferior to mine; and I rejoice to think, that, with all her good feeling and affectionate nature, she belongs to a class where she may dare to be happy in the most rational way."

"I fear you will be disappointed in her," said Mrs. Browne, to whom almost every word in this long speech had been displeasing.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," returned she, "for you must have had opportunities of knowing her so well; but I am an obstinate person, and I must judge of people and things for myself."

"I beg," said Mrs. Browne, afraid lest she had committed herself, "that you will rightly understand my words. I fear rather that you have over-estimated the happiness of tradespeople, as a class; they always appear to me to want refinement."

"It may be so," said Mrs. Barwell, "but my uncle and aunt were truly refined in mind and manner; he was more of a gentleman than most men of fashion, because his refinement and delicacy was that of the heart. If I have to discover that such as he and his incomparable wife are but the exceptions to the class, my disappointment will be a bitter one!"

"Of all the absurd women that ever I saw," said Mrs. Browne, that same evening, to her hus-

band, "Mrs. Barwell is the absurdest. She has the most *outre* notions about tradespeople being so much happier, and so much more desirable as acquaintance than the gentry, that really I felt it almost like a personal affront!"

"She must be an extraordinary person," said Browne.

"It was the most ridiculous thing in the world," continued she, "to hear her talking about some old shop-keeping uncle of hers, whom she was brought up with."

"People generally wish to drop such low connexions," remarked her husband.

"But," said Mrs. Browne, "she is one of those people who pride themselves on eccentric opinions; one would think, to hear her talk, that she would be only too happy to exchange Moreby Lodge for a little tea-dealer's shop, with only a back parlour. I protest I never heard such nonsense as she talked; she'll be a famous subject for Harriet Jennings. I must tell her, the first time I see her! And then, to hear her raving about the Gregsons! Would you believe it?—she says they came into this neighbourhood—bought Moreby Lodge—on purpose to be near the Gregsons!"

Mr. Browne, although not much given to laughter, burst out into a loud fit of merriment, and inquired what Colonel Barwell said to all this?

"I did not see the Colonel," replied Mrs. Browne; "but he must be a Jerry Sneak, for she says he lets her do just as she will in all these fancies. *She* came down and took the house, and seems to rule everything. I am con-

vinced, oy many things she said, that they are not first-rate people!"

Her husband agreed with her; and so the conversation ended.

If the sworn friendship had been growing cooler and cooler between Mrs. Browne and Mrs. Gregson, this coming in of a third friend put an end to it at once.

Mrs. Browne had, as we saw at the commencement of the last chapter, admitted into her mind many causes of dissatisfaction; but greater than all was the fact, which Mrs. Barwell had unwittingly revealed, that she had formed another friendship, of which she was permitted to know nothing. She had been deceived in the very beginning; "and think," pondered she, "what would she have been but for me? She owes everything to me, as she has avowed hundreds of times; but this is what one gets by throwing away one's friendship on common people!" The "Miranda and Elvira friendship" seemed little short of insanity; and she most heroically dragged forth a hair trunk, containing, under lock and key, all the letters she had ever received from Mrs. Gregson, tied up in yearly packets, and variously inscribed—"From my sweet friend, Elvira, 179—"—"Letters and notes from the sister of my soul, from 1799 to 1802"—"Poems, by my beloved Elvira, 179—." She could not go through even the inscriptions of them. She was at a loss how to destroy them, for they were so many, they would smother any ordinary fire; they were so foolish, they must not be seen by any one. She locked the box again, and ordered Martin to carry it into the lumber garret.

These memorials of "eternal friendship" being thus removed from view, she took the signed and sealed Family Compact, and, without vouchsafing it a single glance, tore it to pieces, and thrust it deep down into the very centre of her dressing-room fire.

Things were not arrived quite at this stage with Mrs. Gregson; she, as she said, had felt the growing coolness of late, with great distress of mind. She was not conscious, in her own heart, of any decrease of affection. Nay, she was sure that the tears she had shed about her friend's indifference, proved that she still was faithful as ever; still, although she, perhaps, had not yet changed, she was in that state when she was capable of being changed; and the very comparison, which she could not help drawing, between the assumption of superiority on the part of Mrs. Browne, whom, she knew, was reckoned by everybody in Woodburn only as an upstart, and the genuine, open-hearted affection volunteered to her by Mrs. Barwell, by whose slightest notice all Woodburn reckoned itself honoured, wrought that very change. She was satisfied to let Mrs. Browne slide out of her heart, seeing that a better one was willing to take her place; and one, more especially, who was satisfied with Mr. Gregson as he was; and who thought the children neither rude nor spoiled; and who declared, that Lucy must go and spend weeks with her. That was more than Mrs. Browne had done for years, although she was affianced to Charlie; and now that affair—that Family Compact—seemed of doubtful wisdom to her mind. She determined to mention it to Mrs.

Barwell, and, if she thought so too, to withdraw herself and her daughter from it. There was a sweet satisfaction in her mind at the thought of this: "It will prove," she said, "that I have some spirit."

The Family Compact was explained to Mrs. Barwell, on the next occasion of their meeting, and her counsel required.

"Such schemes," said Mrs. Barwell, "never could succeed; nor is it desirable that they should. Young Browne may, and very probably will, grow up a most unfit husband for your Lucy; how, then, could you urge such a union? Besides, it places the young people themselves in so unpleasant a position towards each other. I should expect dislike rather than affection to be the consequence."

"So it has been," said Mrs. Gregson; "they have disliked each other for years. Lucy is a dear, affectionate girl, and has love enough for all the world; but she detests Prince Charlie—we always called him so. Charles Edward is his name; and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' was the name he went by throughout Woodburn—the very boys used to shout it after him."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Barwell.

"It was his mother's doing!" returned the other.

"The greater the pity," replied she; "a nickname is a cruel thing! But what kind of boy is he? He must be fourteen or fifteen now."

"He will soon be eighteen," said Mrs. Gregson; "he has been at Rugby, and is to go to Cambridge, I believe: he is to be a barrister, they say.

He is a fine youth, I hear; but I have not seen him now for nearly two years. He never comes near us; for he has a deal of his mother's spirit about him; likes mixing with great people, and all that kind of thing; and Lucy dislikes him so much, that I never ask him to come now."

"You must say no more about this. Family Compact," remarked Mrs. Barwell; "never mention it to Lucy; you can talk it over easily with Mrs. Browne; most likely she will be as glad to abandon the idea as you, if she has not already done so, which is most likely."

"She thinks, I have no doubt," replied Mrs. Gregson, "of Prince Charlie marrying some great person's daughter; for you see Browne has great influence among the county families; and I am sure that youth carries his head high enough for anything. I know well that they all of them despise us, because we are connected with trade; which is very absurd, you know, if one only remembers what Mrs. Browne's father was—a common grocer!"

"Do not let it pique you at all, dear Mrs. Gregson," said Mrs. Barwell, smiling; "let young Browne marry some great person's daughter, if he please; you may make Lucy far happier by marrying her to such a tradesman as my dear aunt married, even than by marrying her to many a man with a title."

"But," said Mrs. Gregson, "one naturally wishes to see one's children rise in the world."

"She need not do better than you have done," returned her friend, "with that fine, English-looking, manly husband of yours."

Mrs. Gregson was gratified by the compliment on her husband, but still she was not satisfied.

"Have no concern about Lucy," said Mrs. Barwell; "she will marry well, never fear; only leave her to choose a husband for herself."

This conversation was decisive. Mrs. Gregson packed up her copy of the Family Compact, and sent it, with the following note, to Mrs. Browne.

Bridge-street, October 21, 1820.

My dear Sarah—I would not, for the world, hold you bound in any way contrary to your wishes. I know that your feelings are not what they used to be towards us. I therefore send you my copy of the Family Compact, wishing entirely to withdraw from it. I shall leave Lucy free to choose for herself; believing that young people brought up so differently as ours have been, never would be happy together. Besides, Lucy's feelings have long been anything but affectionate towards Prince Charlie; to whom, however, I wish all happiness and prosperity. I am, dear Sarah, yours, as ever,

Rebecca Gregson.

Mrs. Browne was infinitely annoyed at receiving this packet and note: she had destroyed, with great energy of disgust, her copy of the Compact, as we know, above a week ago. She wished sincerely that she had only taken time about it, and been cool, like Mrs. Gregson; for she was conscious of an exquisite bitterness in the way she had proceeded in the affair. She returned the following note:—

My dear Mrs. Gregson—I am happy to see that we continue to think alike, on the more important topics at least. I have long since, considering the great alteration which so many years have produced in our respective positions in society, given up the idea of the Family Union—supposing, of course, that your good sense had led you to do the same.

I destroyed my copy of the foolish Compact long since; and wish now I had apprized you of the circumstance, as it might earlier have determined you. Perhaps, however, Mrs. Barwell may have been your counsellor; her good sense would have dictated such a step.

With most affectionate wishes for your happiness, and that, also, of your whole family, I am, dear Mrs. Gregson, yours sincerely,

Sarah Browne.

Wilton-street, Oct. 21st.

The very day after this note was written, Colonel and Mrs. Barwell drove to the Brownes'. At that time, a series of dinners was just commencing in Woodburn It was the *on dit* of the little town, that parties would be unusually gay and large this season, in compliment to the new residents of Moreby Lodge, whom everybody seemed disposed to honour. Mr. and Mrs. Browne were intending to give a dinner and grand evening party, which should eclipse everything of the kind, and at which everybody who was *anybody* was to be invited, especially as Mrs. Barwell was to be played off as Mrs. Browne's old and dear friend.

The Barwells, as we said above, called on the

Brownes, and were, of course, received with every mark of respect and cordiality. The servant was ordered to inform his master of the Colonel and his lady being there—Mrs. Browne not failing to inform them that her husband seldom left his office for morning-callers, but that, on the present occasion, he would do so without hesitation; accordingly he came in, bowing and professing himself honoured. The Barwells apologized for taking him from more important business; they had called, they said, merely to beg their company to dinner on the following Monday. "A very unceremonious invitation for a first dinner," thought both husband and wife; but both declared, in one breath, that they should be most happy, and certainly would have that honour.

"Quite a family dinner," said Colonel Barwell, "to meet some friends of my wife's—Mr. and Mrs. Gregson, I believe."

Had Mr. and Mrs. Browne been dropped down at once from a seventh heaven into a snow-wreath, they could not have felt a greater shock than they did at these words; yet, although chagrined beyond measure, they both still spoke of "great honour," and "great pleasure."

When Mrs. Barwell saw the change which passed over the countenance of both the lawyer and his wife, when they found that they were invited merely to dine with the Gregsons, she was sure the evening would be anything but pleasant. She was right; for Mrs. Gregson was no better pleased to meet the Brownes than they to meet with her. She wished to keep Mrs. Barwell's friendship all to herself; and, now that

the breach was widening between herself and her old friend, she felt jealous of any attention shown to her by the new. All was coldness and constraint. Mr. Gregson and the Colonel alone, got on comfortably. He was, as Mrs. Barwell had said, a plain, honest, cordial-hearted man, without pretence of any kind; and the Colonel found him a far more entertaining companion than Mr. Browne, who, spite of all his money-getting, still was but one of a very common class.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIVAL HOUSES.

THERE was no longer now any attempt to conceal the breach between the two houses; that dinner accomplished more than many months of ordinary intercourse could have done. The Brownes were infinitely annoyed to be placed on a par with the Gregsons; and their study through the evening was to prove their superiority—to prove to Mrs. Barwell how ill she had assorted her guests; while poor Mrs. Gregson, whose jealousy was excited by equal attention being shown to the Brownes, was out of humour, and in every way showed to the least advantage.

When the evening was closed, and the two ladies retired to Mrs. Barwell's dressing-room to put on their bonnets and cloaks, they received the

attentions of Mrs. Barwell's woman with the most dignified silence, and, without exchanging so much as a word with each other, paired off from the Lodge with their respective husbands.

No sooner was Mrs. Gregson seated beside her husband in their gig, than she began—"How disrespectful of the Brownes to drive off at that rate, as if we should poison the very high road! They are the most upstart, unbearable people in the world!"

"Browne's horse is so much swifter than ours, we could not have kept up with them," said Mr. Gregson.

"Then they might have kept our pace, one would think," said his wife; "if it had been only out of civility, they ought to have done it. Nothing is so rude as to dash past one in the way they did! But, did not you think the evening very stupid?"

"No," said Gregson, with the most provoking coolness; "I enjoyed it. The Colonel is a very sensible man."

"But, did you ever see anything like those Brownes?" persisted she.

"In what way?" asked her husband.

"Oh, in every way!" returned she; "dressed as she was!—just as if to out-blaze Mrs. Barwell herself. I should really like to know how many gowns she has in a year!—and Browne is an ill-looking, very mean-looking man! I always thought there was not a bit of the gentleman about him;—so different to Colonel Barwell!"

"He is not particularly civil to me just now," said Gregson: "I have displeased him by pressing

for the repayment of that money: but his civility or incivility is of very little consequence to me. You ladies, however, seem to have brought your friendship to a very abrupt termination," added he, laughing.

"La! George!" exclaimed his wife; "don't say a word to me about friendship!—I shall never endure the word again as long as I live. I have known, for years, that we were not at all of accordant characters; but then, it was an old thing—it had become almost a custom. Her pride and her arrogance, however, have quite cured me now. And why need I put up with her airs of superiority?" continued she, "when a lady like Mrs. Barwell solicits my friendship!"

"Only don't be too hot about this new friendship," said her husband; "and, for my part, I think married women with families growing up, ought not to have much time for friendships out of their own houses."

"Now that *is* ill-natured of you—very ill-natured, and extremely uncalled for too!" said Mrs. Gregson; and then, dropping into a meditation on the increasing chagrins of the evening, she spoke not another word till they reached their own door.

Mr. and Mrs. Browne, as has been said, dashed past the humbler gig which contained the Gregsons, in very grand style.

"What a very handsome service of plate that is of the Barwells!" said Mrs. Browne: "but the dinner was nothing extraordinary; the arrangement of the second course was decidedly bad."

Mr. Browne made no reply; he was looking at

the hasty shadow which, in passing, they flung upon the moonlight bank; but he was thinking on a subject that vexed him greatly.

"Did you notice the chandelier in the little drawing-room?" asked his wife.

Her husband replied simply, "No."

"We must have something of that kind in our drawing-room, before we have our party. I got the address from Mrs. Barwell—they had it from London: but I did not tell her that I wanted one for ourselves. I shall not let a creature know a word about it till it is up. But, bless me! what *are* you thinking about?" said she, as her husband still drove on in silence.

"I'm provoked beyond measure," at length said he; "I thought you told me that Gregson's circumstances were bad!"

"To be sure," returned she; "Mrs. Gregson herself told me so—more fool she for talking of such things. She said that Gregson's spirits, and even his health suffered, in consequence."

"Gregson was with me again yesterday, about that money," said Browne; "very pressing and disagreeable he was."

"I thought you were to have six months notice," said she.

"So I ought to have had," replied he; "but it seems I had engaged—how I came to do so, I cannot tell—to pay it in on demand."

"Indeed!" exclaimed she.

"He brought me the note-of-hand, or I should not have believed it," continued Browne. "I therefore, supposing of course that his circumstances were embarrassed, let him have five hun-

dred pounds, which I happened to have in the office at that moment; and then came a demand for five years' interest!"

"Two hundred and fifty pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne; "impossible! I am sure the interest was regularly paid."

"I knew," continued her husband, "that there was two, or at most three years' interest due; but I must say, five seems incredible. However, to that he stands, and most insolently he behaved about it."

"I would not have met them at the Barwells'," said Mrs. Browne, "had I known it! Five years' interest!—impossible!

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds, however," said Browne, "he had from me yesterday—I supposing, all the time, he was on the verge of bankruptcy; and what do you think comes out now?"

"I really cannot tell," said his wife.

"That he actually is in treaty for the Elms!" exclaimed he, in a tone which said, *Can anything exceed that?*

"The Elms!" almost screamed Mrs. Browne; "the very place that you designed for yourself—for which you have already drawn the writings. I'm glad I did not speak to Mrs. Gregson to-night. And she talk of poverty, and try to excite my pity! A deceitful, double-faced woman! I despise her!" exclaimed she, in bitter energy. "But, had he really the face to tell you about it himself?" asked she, a few seconds afterwards.

"No," said her husband; "I should have known nothing of it, but from Colonel Barwell, who, it seems, was in his confidence."

"And betrayed it!" said Mrs. Browne, laughing; "now that is capital."

"So I suppose," said Browne, "for he looked prodigiously foolish at first; but afterwards he went on talking about it in the most absurd way possible. I suppose it is to be his country-seat: he even talked of the fine quantity of game on the land, and his preserves!"

"How perfectly ridiculous!" exclaimed his wife. "But how in the world can all this have been done, and you know nothing of it—you, who were to have been the purchaser?"

"Mordan is at the bottom of it," said Browne; "I have seen him and Gregson together a deal, of late. I must confess that I am provoked—excessively provoked—especially as we were deceived with that miserable plea of poverty."

"I see now," said Mrs. Browne, "why that woman wore that old gown and shawl. I wish to goodness we had had nothing to do with them: they owe everything to us; and this is the return they make! But, thank goodness! we've done with the Gregsons now!"

If it was an amazement to Mr. and Mrs. Browne, to find that Mr. Gregson was the purchaser of the so-much-to-be-desired estate, called the Elms, with its villa-residence, hot-houses, walled gardens, seven acres of lawn and shrubbery, and two hundred acres of fine meadow land, with right of fishing, and preserves for game—far greater was the surprise of Mrs. Gregson herself, when this agreeable fact came to her knowledge. On one particular day in November, Mr. Gregson came into the parlour, where his wife and daughter

were sitting at their work, looking very well pleased, and rubbing his hands together, as was his fashion when any joke was lurking in his mind. He told his wife that he wanted her to drive out with him; that he wished she would order in some cold meat, and let them take an early dinner, for that he wanted to be off in half an hour. Half an hour is a short time for a lady to dress and eat an early dinner in; and, moreover, Mrs. Gregson often required a good deal of coaxing to induce her to go out at all; but her husband looked so good-humoured on this particular day, and, for a November day, it was singularly bright and pleasant; and, over and above all, Mrs. Gregson had a new velvet bonnet, and a very handsome cloak trimmed with fur, which had been ordered since her quarrel with Mrs. Browne, and which she was not at all disinclined to wear, more especially as there was a large head to the gig, capable of defending her handsome apparel from the weather, even if it changed. She did not, therefore, make any objection to ordering in the cold meat, nor to being ready to set out in half an hour, although she had no idea where they were going.

Gregson did not make his wife his confidant in weighty matters, nor yet in trivial ones: it was his way to keep his concerns entirely to himself; t is the way of many husbands, and a bad way it is. In consequence, therefore, Mrs. Gregson often drew very wrong inferences, and formed very erroneous opinions; as, for instance, when she stated to Mrs. Browne that he had experienced losses in trade, and that his mind was troubled in

consequence; which statements being proved to be false, naturally excited Mrs. Browne still more against her.

Away drove Mr. and Mrs. Gregson, on their way to the Elms, having the hap to meet Mrs. Browne, driven by her well-appointed servant, scarcely one hundred yards from the green gates which led up to the house. Very cold indeed was the momentary greeting which the ladies exchanged in their rapid transit; for Mr. Gregson, being in such unusually good spirits, drove very fast himself that day. Mrs. Browne knew that Gregson had bought the Elms, although his wife did not; and, supposing that they were on their way to the place, felt as if they had committed the unpardonable sin—never thinking of the day when she and Browne, with a thousand pounds of Gregson's money in their pocket, went first to look at the great house in Wilton-street.

"Are you going here?" asked Mrs. Gregson, as the green gates were suddenly opened by a little boy, who had been stationed at them for more than an hour, by Gregson's orders: I thought no one was living here."

Gregson smiled to himself, but said nothing; while his wife, satisfying herself that her husband had business there, sedulously admired the evergreens and the red berries of the mountain-ash, which were conspicuous in the well-grown shrubberries. A man, who seemed to be waiting for them on the drive, neared the door as they approached, and, very submissively touching his hat, placed himself at the horse's head the moment Mr. Gregson drew up at the door.

"I would rather wait here till you have finished your business," said Mrs. Gregson, as her husband held forth his hand to assist her to alight.

"No, no; I want you within," said he, accompanying his words with a very comical smile.

Mrs. Gregson accordingly alighted, and, her husband giving her his arm, they entered the house together, she wondering, the while, at all this unwonted ceremony.

"This is a pretty house," said her husband, when he had hurried her through the lower apartments, scarcely giving her time to notice anything, "and a very convenient one; pleasant views, too, from the parlour windows; and the bed-rooms so airy and cheerful; good attics too—excellent attics; good enough for anybody to sleep in!"

"Why, really, Gregson, you might have the place to sell," said his wife; "what *are* we come for?"

"Would you not like such a parlour—drawing-room I suppose you would call it—as this?" said he, leading her into a beautiful drawing-room on the first floor. You would almost outdo Mrs. Browne in a room like this; a piano for Lucy would look well standing there—would it not?"

"How you talk!" exclaimed his wife; "it's quite tantalizing! You know we never could afford a house like this;—why, Sir Henry Forrester was quite one of the first county gentry!"

"And so you don't think we could afford it?" said he; "well, perhaps we couldn't; but I want you to see the bed-rooms before we go."

Mrs. Gregson thought her husband very odd;

and, still wondering whatever he meant, followed him from room to room. At length they came down stairs again, and into the pleasant little breakfast parlour, where a fire was burning, and two old chairs, which had been left after the sale, standing. "Now sit down," said Mr. Gregson, seating himself in great ease, and pointing to the other, which he had just dusted with his pocket handkerchief—for he was not unobservant of his wife's new cloak—"and tell me how you like this house!"

"What nonsense! Gregson," said his wife; "the house is very well; but it can never signify anything to us."

"But, Rebecca," said he, "suppose I were thinking of buying it, should you like to live here?"

"To be sure I should like it, of all things!" replied she.

"Well, then, here you shall live!" exclaimed he, "for the house is mine!—I've bought it, and paid for it!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed his wife.

"It's as true as that my name is Gregson!" said he. "Fifteen thousand five hundred pounds have I paid down for this place!"

"You!" returned she—"you, that I thought had had losses—that I fancied was out of health from anxiety about money-matters—have *you* laid out more than fifteen thousand pounds on a country-house—with five children—four of them boys! Oh, for shame! And you let me wear my old gowns till I was the town's talk—till that wretch, Mrs. Browne, taunted me about my shabby

dress!—and you, all the time, had plenty, and could be laying out your fifteen thousand without saying a word of it to me!"

"So! so!" said he—"don't be out of humour, now, or I shall be sorry I bought the place at all. I thought you would have been delighted, and that I should have had thanks at least;" and Mr. Gregson got up from the chair on which he was sitting.

"Well, I must confess," replied his wife, "that I *am* a little vexed that you never said a word to me about it. I don't like people doing things in that close way. But, now the secret's out, and I know that you have plenty of money, I'll dress handsomely, if it's only for the credit of the family!"

"Why, what would you have?" asked Gregson, just on the verge of ill-humour—"had you not twelve guineas from me, only the other day, for a cloak and bonnet? But, upon my soul, women are the most unreasonable creatures on the face of the earth, else that might have satisfied you, one might think!"

"Oh yes, that was very good, very handsome of you," said she, beginning to mollify as soon as she saw her husband's anger mounting to his brow; "and I'm sure I'm quite delighted with this place, only I can hardly believe it is ours; and I must just run up stairs again, to look at the rooms—it will all seem so different, now I know it is ours—and I want to see if there are any good cupboards—I'm sure there are, though, for I noticed them!"

Gregson stood at the hall-door, battling with the

ill-humour which had clouded his mind, while his wife went alone from room to room, growing prouder at every step, and thinking with herself, that now she would outshine Mrs. Browne; that now she would give grand parties, and have a servant in livery, and consume with envy the heart of her *quondam* friend.

Wonderful things happen every now and then, to give the world something to talk about. The French Revolution was a grand topic; so were the wars of Napoleon Buonaparte. Luddism formerly, and Chartism now, may do for awhile: a comet, the north-west passage, an interesting murder, or the Will of some eccentric old money-saver, all serve as excitements to keep the public mind from stagnating. So happened it in the little world of Woodburn. From time to time some salutary wonder occurred, whereon the public curiosity was fed, and thus prevented from dying of inanition. It had been a world's wonder when the Brownes removed into Wilton-street: the extraordinary friendship of the two ladies, and the affiancing of the young son and daughter, had been a profitable subject also. So had been the coming of the new people to Moreby Lodge; the breach between the old friends; and the whispered rumour which had just got abroad, that Mr. Gregson was embarrassed in his circumstances: but greater than all was the wonder and the talk, when it was told that Mr. Gregson himself was the purchaser of the Elms—a place desired by so many. Not a party met in Woodburn, either for dinner, tea, or cards, at which this subject was not introduced, and fully descanted upon. It was talked of in

the butcher's shop, and in the barber's; and, wherever Mrs. Gregson went for the next month —and she did not stay within doors, by any means as much as she had been accustomed to— was she congratulated upon her husband's purchase. "When do you go to your beautiful place, Mrs. Gregson?" said one; and, "Will you allow us to walk through your beautiful grounds, Mrs. Gregson?" said another; whilst upholsterer and furnishing ironmonger came across the street, hat in hand, begging, if she had five minutes to spare, that she would do them the favour to walk in and look at something very new or beautiful which they would show; and that, even if such things were not wanted at the Elms, they were sure she would be pleased, and they would be honoured, &c. &c.

Mrs Gregson was a woman to be flattered by these, by no means disinterested marks of attention; and, waking or sleeping, the Elms, with the dignity it conferred, and the means of successful rivalry which it would afford, was never out of her mind.

Whilst Mrs. Gregson was thus happily occupying her thoughts, Mrs. Browne was making preparation for her grand party. Invitations were issued three weeks beforehand; a house-decorator was sent for from London; a distinguished French cook, it was rumoured, was engaged for the occasion; the various coachmen and carriers brought in large boxes and hampers, labelled "glass," and ordered to be taken "with care;" so that evidences of preparation were sufficiently visible to keep the Brownes' dinner and evening party in the mind of

everybody. Martin, Mrs. Browne's woman, also communicated to her confidantes, that her mistress had a new velvet dress, with a plume of ostrich-feathers for her head, and a new and very costly suit of pearls come down from London; so that not even the Queen of England could look better than she would; for her mistress, she said, was very handsome—everybody said so, who saw her in full dress.

The important day at length came. The new chandelier was hung, and looked splendidly; everybody who was invited, failed not to be there There were the Sykes Willoughbys; the Jenningses, male and female; the three gentlemen who so many years before, as we related in a former chapter, stood on the bowling-green of the Red Lion, talking over Mr. Browne's earlier prospects; and there were also two of the ladies—the other two being dead—who, that same day, interrupted their game at whist, to discuss Mrs. Browne's appearance at church. Colonel and Mrs. Barwell of course were there, the latter splendidly dressed—"proving," as Mrs. Browne said, "that she knew what was due to the occasion." There were also the rich county-banker, and his wife and daughters; a Mr. Serjeant ——, from London, and three barristers; besides all the families of any note, for many miles round Woodburn. How the house in Wilton-street held them all was a wonder; but everything was admirably arranged, everybody said; and everybody said, at the same time, that Mr. Browne's income ought to be very good indeed, to support their style of living.

It was on this evening that Mrs. Barwell saw, for the first time, "the Bonnie Prince Charlie," or rather Charles Edward Browne, now grown a tall, manly youth. She had considerable curiosity about him, from his early connexion with her friend, Lucy Gregson; and, from what Lucy's mother had said, was not at all disposed to think favourably of him.

"Who is the young man with the fine countenance and brown hair, that has just entered?" said she to Mrs. Browne, as they were sitting together, a few minutes before dinner? Mrs. Browne looked delighted. "Allow me the honour of introducing him. I did not notice that he had entered."

The introduction was made. This, then, was the "Bonnie Prince," of whom such ridiculous stories had been told. His countenance was unquestionably good; nor were his manners to be objected to. Mrs. Barwell studied him then attentively through the evening, for indications of disposition and character, and her final decision was much less favourable than the first impression had been. It was in vain that his mother besought him, by hints and looks, to pay attention to the daughters of the less dignified guests, or to dance with certain ladies, who had been seated all the evening. "He wants benevolence; he is assuming and selfish," said she to herself. "Mrs. Gregson was not altogether wrong; I am glad that the Family Compact was put an end to!"

When Mrs. Gregson next saw Mrs. Barwell, she eagerly inquired for news of this important

night. "Only to think," said she, "of them figuring away in this style! If they were the first nobility they could do no more!"

"If they were *only* the first gentry," returned Mrs. Barwell, "they would do a deal less; the effort would not be visible, by which all this is done. It is the straining every power—the tension of mind and means—which makes entertainments of this extravagant kind in the middle classes so painful—*so melancholy*, I think! If they would but use their common sense, and live according to their means, instead of aping and trying even to surpass their wealthier fellow-subjects, what a different class they might be!—and how much happier!"

"But surely," said Mrs. Gregson—in whose mind the desire to give great entertainments was beginning to develope itself—"surely, people of the middle classes have as much right as the higher to see and entertain their friends!"

"Unquestionably," said Mrs. Barwell; "but, unfortunately, they are so seldom willing to entertain those who are capable of being their friends; they are always striving after the acquaintance of the class above them, and that very class which will not be their friends, and emulating them in expense. How absurd it is!—because they possess every means of becoming as refined, as intellectual, as capable of enjoying the most elevated pleasures, as the very highest! Why, then, do they not? and make their own class, with its independence of conventionality, what it might be—the very happiest class in society."

"Well, I am sure I don't know," was Mrs.

Gregson's unargumentative reply. "Don't you suppose, then," asked she, the moment after, "that Mrs. Browne's entertainment gave her any pleasure?"

"I do not believe," said Mrs. Barwell, "that she had half the satisfaction in her entertainment, although it cost so much, and her rooms were so completely filled, as my good uncle and aunt used to have, when their half-dozen old friends came to take tea with them at six, and eat a slice of seed-cake, and drink a glass of good wine—for the old man was very choice in his wine—at nine, and away again at ten."

"I am sick of that old uncle and aunt," thought Mrs. Gregson.

"No," continued Mrs. Barwell, without, of course, knowing her companion's thoughts, "there was more cordial enjoyment—more real heart and good fellowship, in the meeting of those quiet, undignified people, who were capable, nevertheless, of discussing, and well too, the topics of the day, literature included, than in all the racket and show of common entertainments. There was a vacuum, too, in that little society, when my good uncle and aunt died, which never could be filled up; and I am convinced that those old friends never met, without talking of those whom they had lost, and drinking a cup of good fellowship to their memory. On the contrary, in society such as this, which constitutes the *bon-ton* of Woodburn, and at the head of which is our friend Mrs. Browne——"

"Don't call her *my* friend," interrupted Mrs. Gregson.

"Well, as you please about that," said Mrs. Barwell. "What I would insist upon is, that there can be no sympathy—no affection—no friendship—in society composed of such elements as met last week. If the Brownes were to die to-morrow, or, which is more likely, to ruin themselves in behoof of those with whom they wish to associate, none would pity them—none would open their doors to receive them!"

"Nor would they for others, in a similar case," said Mrs. Gregson.

"To be sure not," replied Mrs. Barwell; "that would be expecting too much from society, as it is now constituted. For what do those common herds of people meet together? Not for friendship, or any moral improvement—or the enjoyment of conversation—or fine music—or any rational pleasure whatever; but to see how good a dinner a certain person can set out; what knowledge he has of wine; what is his show of plate; what number of servants he keeps; how he dresses: and, on the entertainer's part, not how much positive happiness he can give his guests, but how, by all possible means, he may surpass any similar entertainment given by any of his acquaintance. I am not, by any means, an uncharitable person; on the contrary, I generally ascribe the best motives to every-day actions, and my sympathies are almost universal; but these things are to barefaced for me to be deceived by them."

"I'm sure I shall never venture to ask you to a party at the Elms; and yet, you know, we shall be expected to give parties there, quite different to anything in Bridge-street."

"In the matter of parties at the Elms," said Mrs. Barwell, "do, my dear Mrs. Gregson, let me be your good angel. Do not attempt to out shine Mrs. Browne, nor even to vie with her, because your husband has bought that pretty place, and may probably disconnect himself from trade."

"No—that he never will," interrupted Mrs. Gregson: "I wish he would! I am sure he is very rich; but he is so close about money-matters!"

"But why should he disconnect himself with trade?" asked her friend. "Your elder sons are now growing up to take part with him in business—to allow their father occasional leisure; but, depend upon it, a man accustomed from his youth upwards to business, is never so happy as when reasonably employed by it. Besides, Mr. Gregson is not old enough to retire yet; nor his sons old enough, or experienced enough, to conduct the business themselves. In ten or fifteen years, when they are married, and begin to understand what responsibility really is, then advise Mr. Gregson to retire from business, and to take to gardening or farming, or to sink down, if he like it better, into the quiet old gentleman. But for Heaven's sake, my dear friend, do not think of rivalling Mrs. Browne: the effect upon your children would be lamentable! But perhaps I have already said too much," added she, observing a change pass over Mrs. Gregson's countenance. "If I have wounded your feelings in any way, I sincerely regret it; for I have a deep interest both in you and your children, and I earnestly wish them well—Lucy especially: she may be made a noble character!"

Mrs. Gregson laid her hand on her friend's arm, really touched by what she had said of the children. "No, I am not offended," she said; "I would not be offended by anything you might say; but I would not for the world that Gregson heard all you say; he seems to have misgivings, now he has bought the place! He talks of letting it; he has let the land, you know. And, only think what a coming down that would be, not to go there after all that has been said about it; what a triumph it would be to Mrs. Browne!"

"Never mind Mrs. Browne," said Mrs. Barwell, laughing; "you really make that poor lady of too much consequence! But, depend upon it, you will go to the Elms after all!"

"I doubt it," said Mrs. Gregson.

"Trust me," replied her friend, "as the spring comes on, and your husband sees how sweet it looks when the leaves are out, and the garden in order, he will be as impatient to get there as yourself."

"So I said the other day," returned she, "and we'd quite a quarrel about it."

"That was a pity!" said Mrs. Barwell; "but, for the future, do not say too much on the subject. Leave everything to work its own course, and I shall be wonderfully deceived in Mr. Gregson if all be not as you wish."

CHAPTER XI.

WHO SHALL BE GREATEST?

THE spring came on singularly early, and with unusual beauty. The shrubbery at the Elms was full of spring flowers, and Mr. Gregson, who, through the winter, as his wife had said, was filled with misgivings about his bargain, and reluctance to give up his old habits, to assume a higher style of living, although to rank a step higher in society, no sooner saw the violet-bed sprinkled with its white and blue flowers—no sooner scented the first waft of sweet-briar odour, than he was filled with an insatiable longing to become a dweller in the country. He walked rapidly through the grounds; he then sauntered quietly about; gathered the violets with all the eagerness of a school-boy, and peeped into the hedges and bushes of laurustinus, and into the low boughs of the young firs, to see if there were yet any birds'-nests. All at once, he thought how delighted his young people would be to be there—to live there. He had damped all their hopes in the winter; he had even been angry when they had called the Elms pleasanter than Bridge-street. It is wonderful what influence the first breaking out of spring—young, generous, genial spring—has upon our moral being. Mr. Gregson wondered he had never thought of the pleasure his children would have there before; of the pleasant relaxation it would be to the elder, after business; what a sweet and proper home for Lucy, now so womanly in her

appearance, and so very pretty too; to say nothing of the happy holidays the young boys might spend there. He reproached himself for having been selfish; he wondered no longer at his wife's reluctance to give it up; gathered another bunch of violets; took another whiff of sweet-briar odour, and then walked on rapidly to talk to the gardener about the green-house and vines, and tell him, that as the family would be there early in the season, he must prepare his garden-crops. He next ordered the labourer to take down the board which announced that the place wanted a tenant; and then, giving the man a shilling, rode home in good humour, both with himself and all the world.

Mrs. Gregson needed no pressing to become mistress of the Elms; her husband's impatience equalled her own: they therefore, that same evening, walked into the town to order Mr. Stirrup, a man of universal business, to meet them the next morning at the Elms, to consider what was first to be done, in order that the removal might take place as early as possible. Great pleasure indeed had Mrs. Gregson in communicating this intelligence to Mr. Stirrup, for thus she knew it would not be long before it reached the people in Wilton-street—Mr. Stirrup being always employed for them, in one way or other, either to rectify Venetian blinds, to cure a smoky chimney, or to correct some new cooking apparatus, or fifty other little jobs—he being, as Mrs. Browne had often said, her right-hand man.

That very night, Mr. Stirrup having to take home a patent coffee-pot which had leaked

informed Mrs. Browne of the intended change; and, while Mr. and Mrs. Gregson, after tea, were eagerly talking it over, Mr. and Mrs. Browne likewise, after their dinner, were talking it over too.

"And so the Gregsons are really going to the Elms at last," said Mrs. Browne, an hour later in the same evening, to Mrs. Jennings and her daughter Harriet, now approaching the meridian of life, with whom she was taking her coffee.

"We have hitherto visited at the Elms," said Mrs. Jennings: "we knew the Jukeses intimately; and Sir Henry Forrester, who built it, was my cousin. It would make him come out of his grave, if he knew that his pet place, over which he spent so much taste and so much money, had gone to the Gregsons! Bless me, what changes there have been in Woodburn since those days!"

Both Mrs. Browne and Miss Harriet Jennings thought it as well that the old lady should not particularize all the changes which Woodburn had seen in the last twenty years; therefore that subject was dropped.

"Have you heard," said Mrs. Browne, "of the death of Major Barwell, the Colonel's brother?"

The ladies had, but they solicited any further particulars.

"The Major," said Mrs. Browne, "has, I understand, left one daughter; but where she is I do not know; nor does anybody, that I can find. The Major, it seems, left by will forty thousand pounds, to be laid out in landed property for his daughter. She is to be such a great heiress, and will inherit, it is said, all the Colonel's property!"

"Unless," said Mrs Jennings, "it is left to that Miss Gregson; for they tell me that she is as much at Moreby Lodge as at her own home."

"It's quite absurd," said Mrs. Browne, "the way they have taken to that girl. I met the carriage yesterday, and there she was, stuck up beside Mrs. Barwell, with feathers in her hat!"

"Oh yes," said Miss Jennings, "she is quite assuming the young lady."

"We shall have her coming out in the winter," said Mrs. Browne, "chaperoned, of course, by Mrs. Barwell."

"Do you know," said Miss Jennings, "that mamma took her the other day for Miss Wilmot, Mrs. Sykes Willoughby's beautiful niece, and asked after her aunt and the young ladies!"

"Upon my word, I did," said Mrs. Jennings. 'There she was, in Mason's shop, buying lace—dressed beautifully. And, whether it was that the bonnet gave her the look, or whether she imitates Miss Wilmot, or whether my sight is not so good as it was, I can't say; but certainly I did take her for Miss Wilmot; and a great compliment it was, for Miss Wilmot is beautiful. She was then with Mrs. Barwell," continued the old lady, "and, 'I beg your pardon,' said I, as soon as I saw Mrs. Barwell, 'I thought you were a young lady I knew: I mistook her,' said I to Mrs. Barwell, 'for Miss Wilmot.' 'You are not the first person who has done so,' said Mrs. Barwell; 'I myself think them very like, but Lucy Gregson has rather the advantage in height.'"

"Lucy Gregson like Miss Wilmot—and taller too!" exclaimed Mrs. Browne; "I wonder what

we shall have next! Lucy Gregson is a raw girl, without any style at all! But I assure you, Mrs. Barwell has the oddest notions and tastes! Now, I'll tell you what she herself told me!" And then Mrs. Browne edified the two ladies with the history of the uncle and aunt who kept the little tea-shop, and also of the early acquaintance with her as a school-girl, when she lived with her ancient grandmother.

"I do not wonder at her low tastes, then," said Mrs. Jennings.

"And yet she is a perfect gentlewoman," said Miss Harriet; "living in the world, you know, has made her that; and, for my part, I think her manners excellent."

"No doubt of it," returned Mrs. Browne; "she is, as you say, a perfect gentlewoman; but what I tell you of her early days, and her peculiar tastes and predilections—for every word of what I have told you I had from her own mouth—may account for the strange mixture of good sense and absurdity there is in her."

Many of the wise people of Woodburn, besides the Jenningses, thought it rather a strange fancy of Mrs. Barwell, to be so very intimate with the Gregsons, and to have almost, as it seemed, adopted Lucy. True, the Gregsons had by this time left their house in Bridge-street, and had assumed altogether a higher style of living: still, *he* bought cheese as formerly: and *she*, with all her striving, did not rise above the wife of a rich tradesman; and the people of Woodburn, therefore, wondered on.

How often had Mrs. Gregson censured her

friend Mrs. Browne, for aping the style and bearing of a person of fashion! for hungering and thirsting, as it were, after the notice and intimacy of the county families—the Sykes Willoughbys, and the rest of them! But in censuring her, she only did what we all, more or less, do every day—blamed her for that, from the temptation to which she herself was exempt. She had not, however, been settled many months in her new habitation, possessed at the same time of the knowledge that her husband was undoubtedly a man of prosperity and substance, than she too began to have similar aspirings. Another sentiment also governed her, no less strong than personal ambition—the desire not only to rival, but to outshine Mrs. Browne.

Whilst they had lived among the cheese warehouses in Bridge-street, whatever might have been the amount of her husband's income, or however expensive might have been the style of living they had chosen to adopt, she well knew that they must rank many degrees below the wealthy solicitor who inhabited his own large house in Wilton-street; but things had now taken a little turn; their present residence was as much above the Brownes', in Wilton-street, as their former one had been below it. They seemed to have decidedly turned a corner in the great pathway of society; they had left their old acquaintance behind them, and were going forward through new prospects, and with new people, among whom they might naturally form connexions. Mrs. Gregson, therefore, dropped all intimacy with her less dignified acquaintance, and was "not at home" when Mrs. Mason, the draper's wife, who

had hired a fly for the occasion, drove over to the Elms, to make her first call; and, in order to cut the intimacy more decidedly, went a shopping to the county-town, as many families—the Sykes Willoughbys and the rest did—on the plea that there was neither style nor variety in Mason's fancy goods. The countenance of Mrs. Barwell, a lady whose station in society was unquestionable, and who visited everybody, was a great happiness to her. Little did Mrs. Barwell know the seeds of ambition which were springing up to vigorous growth in her friend's heart. True, she was not long in making the discovery, that Mr. and Mrs. Gregson, although tradespeople, were not characterised by her uncle and aunt's single-mindedness and simplicity, yet nobility of heart; and she began to fear that her search after happiness, like that of many others, would end in disappointment: yet, for the present at least, she persisted in hoping the best. Besides this, she had volunteered publicly, as it were—publicly, at least, as it had become—her friendship to Mrs. Gregson, to whom she knew that no mortification could be so cruel as the withdrawing of it. Mrs. Barwell, too, had been let into the secrets of the rival houses; she liked the Brownes no better than Mrs. Gregson liked them herself, and she would not willingly give them the least triumph over her. Still, she had a difficult part to act. Mrs. Gregson was not satisfied with her as a half and half partisan; and her moderation and good sense view of things continually threatened disunion between them. Then followed the long letters of deprecation; the bitter self-condemnation; the visit of tears; the

humility; and the gratitude—more oppressive than all.

Spite, however, of all this show of attachment, and willingness to be guided, no human being ever was more perversely determined to take her own course than was poor Mrs. Gregson. Her true mode of reasoning, stripped of all its sentiment—for at this time she tried to impose upon herself a belief of disinterested attachment to her new friend—was something like this:—"Here we are now at the Elms—a dozen steps higher in society than in Bridge-street, and I have fairly put an end now to all Bridge-street intimacies. Gregson after all, it seems, is very rich—rich enough to write esquire after his name. Our house is most handsomely furnished; we have a gardener, a groom, and women servants—more than ever I kept in my life before; and, before long, I'll have a servant in livery, and a handsome phaeton of my own. I know I can have them; for I have remarked many little tendencies to show and stylishness in Gregson, of late; and, why should we not show the world that we know how to make use of good fortune? What *will* Mrs. Browne say to 'the Gregsons' carriage!—to their gardener, and groom, and footman?' Oh, it's capital! Poor Mrs. Barwell, after all her riot about those old-fashioned tradespeople, will soon find in England, now-a-days, that those manners are gone by: people have not now the same miserable notions that they had forty years ago; besides, those people were poor—so different to us, even if that way of life would satisfy one Mrs. Barwell is a very good sort of woman; but she gives

advice on what she knows nothing about. She, were she in our case, would do as we do—not as she advises. She is, nevertheless, an excellent person, and, as I know it mortifies the Brownes that we should be so intimate, I am determined to keep up the warmest friendship with her; and I really think she is fond of Lucy, and Lucy is much improved since she has been so much at Moreby Lodge: for there is a something about rich people, and people accustomed to society, that one cannot acquire after one's habits are formed. I fear I never shall do proper justice to our fortune; but, if dressing well will do, I will dress well!—and I'll go into good society too—nor will I worry about the saving of sixpence, as I have done! There's one thing, however, that does vex me: the Barwells never ask us to any of their large parties. She pretends not to like Mrs. Browne, and yet, the Brownes dined there only last week; and, what was most provoking of all, she sent Lucy home the day before, although I had got her a dress on purpose! I declare, if I had not the greatest respect for her in the world, I could have quarrelled with her about it; and, after all, much as I like her, I would far rather be invited to their great parties, and be thus treated as an equal in society, than as a humble friend, who, like a governess or an upper servant, is to leave the room the moment a guest enters. However, I shall make no quarrel about it. I shall choose my own opportunities, and I'll make them all, by one means or another, the steps of the ladder by which I'll climb!"

So worked, day after day, the mind of poor

Mrs. Gregson; and many of the schemes she had devised, which, a few months before, would have seemed like wild chimeras, realized themselves in a manner which surprised even her: for instance, that of having a carriage which should outvie the Brownes'. But, in the first place, a word must be said about Mr. Gregson. He, as our readers may have premised, from his secret way of purchasing the Elms, and misleading his wife with regard to his circumstances, was not in the habit of confiding to her his intentions. He was naturally kind and indulgent; but he was close-tempered, and liked to do everything in his own way. His wife, therefore, was not aware that a process similar to that which was going on in her mind, was operating also on his, and that he was no little flattered by the attentions of Colonel and Mrs. Barwell; and that a desire to show himself to the world as a wealthy man, was beginning to take hold of him. He was beginning to covet the influence which a man possesses from being known to the rich—from being surrounded by that which money can alone obtain. Had his wife known all these workings of his mind, she would have been wonderfully delighted. However, she did not; and therefore a second surprise was in store for her.

When Gregson walked in the garden and shrubbery of the Elms, in the early spring-time, as we mentioned, he thought how the boys would enjoy having horses to ride during the vacations. He accordingly, as soon as he came to reside there, bought a couple of hackneys for their use. They had, however, now left school, and were gone, the

one to pursue his legal, and the other his clerical studies; for Mr. Gregson, having placed the hereditary business in the hands of his elder sons, selected the bar and the church for his younger, more especially as a rich living was in the gift of Colonel Barwell, who, he hoped, might be induced to bestow it on his son—at least, thought he, if we manage our cards well! In the absence of these youths, therefore, the horses were not needed, and to the fair they accordingly were sent—Mr. Gregson himself riding over to see them sold. The next day he returned, the groom having brought home, half an hour before, a most valuable horse, which, he said, his master intended to drive with the last new one.

Gregson, when he returned, told his wife that he had been a great fool, for that he had bought a horse which had cost more than four times the price of the two hackneys; and that, moreover, as he thought it would be a sin not to have a suitable carriage, he had also ordered a new britchka, like Colonel Barwell's—exactly like it, colour and all!

Mrs. Gregson was overjoyed. The Brownes themselves had nothing in the shape of a carriage, to compare with the Barwells' britchka. She thanked her husband joyfully, and then began to think how she must certainly have a new bonnet—nay, a complete new dress, for her first appearance in the carriage—so should Lucy; and now they should, indeed, dazzle the eyes of all Woodburn! She held a council with herself, whether she should tell Mrs Barwell. How would Mrs. Barwell take it? for, she fancied her friend had

often looked cool, whenever she made an effort to be like her richer neighbours. "She wants us," reasoned Mrs. Gregson, "to be like those horrid tea-people! I know it so well; and how absurd it is of her! I should not wonder if we are nearly as rich as Colonel Barwell himself! I don't think I will tell her! I must have Lucy at home, however, to go with me to ——, that we may get our dresses home against Sunday;" it being Mr. Gregson's intention, as he had said, to drive to church in the new britchka.

To Moreby Lodge, therefore, Mrs. Gregson drove in her very best apparel, although in the old gig, to fetch home Lucy. Mrs. Barwell was looking extremely happy as she entered, and had an open letter in her hand.

"Sit down, my dear friend," said she; "I want you to congratulate me!—I am going to have a daughter of my own—a full-grown daughter—older even than Lucy—to live with me altogether, for me to love, and to educate just in my own manner! Now congratulate me!" said she, as Mrs. Gregson, who was not at all pleased at what she heard, fearing that Lucy would thus lose the regards of the lady of Moreby Lodge, still remained silent.

"I do congratulate you," said Mrs. Gregson, but in a voice which was anything but congratulatory; "I'm sure I do; but who do you mean?"

"I told you," said Mrs. Barwell, "of the death of my husband's brother—he who left the money to purchase the estate for his daughter—it is she. She is a beautiful girl, I am told. I have not seen her, however, for seven years—not since we parted with her at Madras, when she came to

England for her education. She was then eleven; she is now, consequently, eighteen."

"But," asked Mrs. Gregson, by no means pleasantly interested for this young lady, "how is it that she has been in England all these years, yet you have not seen her?"

"When she came to England, seven years ago," said Mrs. Barwell, "she was intrusted to the care of her mother's sister, in London, who was a lady of a large independent fortune. After Mary Anne had been three years at school, her aunt took her into France, and thence into Italy. At Florence her aunt became acquainted with a celebrated Marquis, whom she married. He had been concerned deeply, it seems, in some rebellion against the Austrian government—has been imprisoned, and has suffered dreadfully, I believe. He has been now restored to liberty, but on the sole condition of perpetual banishment; they are going to South America, and Mary Anne is to be restored to us. It is, as far as I am concerned, a most happy circumstance; and I doubt not of its being a fortunate one for her. Colonel Barwell and myself set off to-morrow for Dover—we are going into Italy to fetch her. I was going to send Lucy home this afternoon, for it has taken us quite by surprise. Lucy is now with the gardener in the hot-house, selecting some plants for herself. Perhaps you would like to walk to her," said Mrs. Barwell, seeing that Mrs. Gregson appeared unaccountably silent.

"Oh, no, no!—that is, not unless you want to get rid of me!" said she.

"No, indeed, I am most happy to see you,"

said Mrs. Barwell, smiling. "You will, perhaps, stay the day with me, for it will be three months before we return: we intend going on to Rome."

"When do you go?—to-morrow, did you say?" asked Mrs. Gregson, thinking directly, that they would not then see the new britchka at church.

"Yes, to-morrow," said Mrs. Barwell: "we are quite impatient to set off: Morgan has been packing since six o'clock this morning. Mary Anne was extremely fond of us in India; she is a sweet girl, and her letter is quite affecting; you must read it: it shows a very good heart; and I love her for her devotion to her aunt. They have been in prison, you see—both of them." said she, the tears starting to her eyes, as she followed Mrs. Gregson's progress through the letter. "Poor thing!—and so young too—she must have suffered a great deal!"

"Yes, certainly!" said Mrs. Gregson, returning the letter. "But I have to drive to ——; I want to go a shopping, and came for Lucy to go with me; I am sorry, therefore, that I cannot stop the day with you. But I hope now that you will commission me with anything, in your absence; and Gregson, I am sure, will be most happy to be the Colonel's steward, or bailiff, or anything, while he is away. What can we do for you?"

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Barwell; "the Colonel is now gone down to Woodburn, to talk to your husband. He wants him to sell the carriage-horses—they do not exactly suit us—and the britchka too."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Gregson, who determined to take this opportunity of telling her friend of

the new acquisition; "and do you really mean to sell the britchka? Do you know, Gregson admired it so much, that he has ordered one just like it for ourselves."

Mrs. Barwell's countenance wore an instantaneous expression very like disgust.

"Well, only see now!" *thought* Mrs. Gregson; "I do believe she is vexed that we should drive a britchka like them!" but sne still continued the topic on which she was speaking. "It is to come home on Saturday," she said; "and I want Lucy to go with me to buy new dresses; for you know we must be all of a piece!"

The necessity for Mrs. Barwell to make any observation, was prevented by Lucy coming in at that moment. "Oh, mamma, are you here?" she exclaimed; "and has Mrs. Barwell told you?" she asked, eagerly.

"About the young lady coming?" inquired her mother.

"No, no, not that! May I tell her, dear Mrs. Barwell?" asked Lucy of that lady.

"You may," said Mrs. Barwell, but in a voice much colder than ordinary.

"Then, mamma," said Lucy, "you must know that I was coming home this afternoon in the most beautiful little carriage!—so low and easy, and so well-built!—with the loveliest pair of ponies that ever you saw in your life; and it's a present to you from—whom do you think?—from Colonel Barwell!"

Mrs. Gregson wished she had said nothing about the britchka; she made a hundred protestations of gratitude and delight—said that she always

preferred a low carriage to a high one—that she was not particularly fond of britchkas—that it was all her husband's doing—that she must thank the dear Colonel herself—she must go that very instant—she would drive to Woodburn, and find him at the warehouse, with her husband."

"Do no such thing," said Mrs. Barwell, very decidedly; "Lucy has thanked him: he hates gratitude—at least, he hates many thanks. But the best of the ponies is, that they are perfectly safe; you or Lucy may drive them; Lucy drove them fourteen miles yesterday; and, as you have to go to ——, you had better drive there at once—you are here so far on your way."

"Do mamma!" exclaimed Lucy—all animation—"I will drive you!"

"But shall we not need a servant with us?" asked Mrs. Gregson; "Joseph drove me here; he has his best clothes on, and he looks respectable."

"There's no room for Joseph," said Lucy; "and, besides, as he is here with the gig, he shall take home my plants. I will go and order them to be packed;" and away she went.

Mrs. Gregson, although she again spoke her thanks, could not help feeling a little mortified that no seat had been provided for a servant. "Mrs. Barwell," thought she, "never goes out attended by less than two servants; but I suppose they think we have no business with one at all: the very ponies, I am told, are so quiet that Lucy can drive them: and thus the present was not without its mortifying drawback.

CHAPTER XII.

GROWING GREAT.

"I AM glad we are going to Italy for three months," thought Mrs. Barwell to herself, as Lucy and her mother drove away in the little pony phaeton—"and that the britchka is going to be sold too! How it would have vexed the Colonel to see the Gregsons driving in such a one! What a want of good common sense there is in those people, after all! and, I begin to be very much afraid that my feelings towards her have been excited rather by enthusiasm than judgment!"

Contrary to Mrs. Barwell's advice, Mrs. Gregson, who was delighted by the elegance of the little town-built carriage, and the perfectly-matched and faultless ponies, and the harness—the like of which had never been seen in Woodburn—forgot at once the want of an attendant groom, and ordered Lucy to drive into Woodburn, up Wilton-street, that Mrs. Browne might have a chance of seeing them; and so to Bridge-street, where she might catch the Colonel before he had finished his business with her husband.

Mrs. Browne, it happened, had just been calling on the Jennings, and was walking up the street as Mrs. Gregson and her daughter drove into it. The ladies had ceased all familiar greetings since the day on which they dined together at the Barwells'; on this particular occasion, however, Mrs. Gregson said to her daughter, "Let us stop

and speak to her, for I know it will half kill her to see us with this sweet equipage!"

Lucy accordingly checked the speed of the ponies, as Mrs. Browne approached. Mrs. Browne, in the meantime, had been speculating with herself who, in the world, the ladies could be: before Lucy, however, began to prepare for a halt, she had recognized them; and that, too, with a sentiment of envy and aversion. She very well divined why, on this particular occasion, the ceremony of recognition was to take place, and she determined to mortify their vanity. Assuming, therefore, a look of indifference, she passed the already pausing carriage with the coldest recognition, leaving them, as she hoped, to feel very foolish, especially as many people were in the street, all of whom, attracted by Mrs. Gregson in her new carriage, were looking on.

"Was there ever in this world such a malicious woman?" exclaimed Mrs. Gregson to her daughter, feeling mortified, and, spite of the new carriage, a little foolish also, at the bootless halt which they had made. Fortune, however, had not deserted her. It happened that they had stopped before the only shop in Wilton-street; and, although she had never dealt there in her life, no sooner did the ponies draw up to the pavement, than the shopman, who was standing at his door, rushed forth, filled with the hope of a new customer; and, with ready wit, she resolved to avail herself of this mistake, to cover her disgrace, and alighted, following him into the shop, though she knew not what to purchase. Mrs. Browne, whose senses, in the meantime, were all alive, listened for the sound

of the advancing wheels, which, not coming to her ears, hurried her to her own door-steps, that she might thus have an opportunity of looking up the street in a perfectly natural manner. Their house was not above twenty yards distant; and she had the vexation of seeing the shopman bowing Mrs. Gregson across the pavement; so that she entered her own door, quite undecided in her mind whether, after all, they had not been only stopping at the shop—which was a very vexatious thing!

When Mrs. Gregson reached the warehouses in Bridge-street, she found that Colonel Barwell was just gone. Her husband was looking vexed, and a new britchka was standing in the yard.

"Is that our new carriage?" said she: "well, it *is* handsome—and how like the Barwells'! But I'm in luck's way: I want you to see the present I have had made to me!" and she drew him from his desk to the counting-house window, to see the pony phaeton, in which Lucy was sitting, while one of the warehousemen and her two brothers were rapturously admiring the whole faultless equipage.

"What do you think of that?" exclaimed she. "A present to me from Colonel Barwell!"

"I hate those low carriages—drawn by a couple of rats!" said Gregson.

"Now, really!" said his wife.

"And for what must he give you a carriage?" continued he.

"Out of kindness, to be sure," said she: "I always knew that the Barwells liked us."

"I tell you what, Rebecca," said he—"those

Barwells are as proud as Lucifer! Do you know, the old Colonel looked as angry as anything when I showed him the new britchka."

"I thought it was not to come till Saturday," said she.

"It came home last night," returned her husband; "and he would hardly look at it, but said directly, that he would sell his own britchka: now, that's what I call rank pride! He was offended that we should have a britchka as well as he."

"Nothing of the kind!" said Mrs. Gregson; "I can set you right on that score. Mrs. Barwell told me that the Colonel was come down here on purpose to ask you to sell the carriage-horses and the britchka; and *she* knew nothing of our having one."

"I don't know," said he, doubtfully; "but not one word did he say about *my* selling anything for him—only, point blank, as rude as could be, 'I shall sell *my* britchka'—the first moment I spoke about mine."

"I don't think he meant to be rude—I'm sure I don't," replied Mrs. Gregson, rather perplexed in her own mind, notwithstanding; "but perhaps I mistook Mrs. Barwell's meaning," said she, determined to preserve peace between the two houses, at all events; "I dare say I did: but of this I *am* sure, that she told me distinctly, that they were going to sell the carriage-horses and the britchka: she said the Colonel was come to Woodburn about it, and was going to call on you, I thought she said, to ask you to sell them. But I dare say it was only to bid you good-bye, or to tell you of the present he had made me; and that

would account for his looking vexed when you showed him that you had got a carriage. I can't help wishing that it had not come home till Saturday, and then they would have been gone."

At that moment Lucy and her two brothers came in, full of enthusiasm about the ponies, and impatient that their father should go out to see them.

Mr. Gregson reckoned himself a judge of horses, and of all that belonged to them; and he could not but confess, "that for ponies they were very fair; that the harness was of a good make; and that the phaeton was well built. But, ever since he was a boy," he said, "he had had a contempt for ponies and low carriages—they were only fit for old women!"

"Get along with you!" said Mrs. Gregson, pushing him from her and laughing. "And now Lucy," said she, "we will just drive to the pastry-cook's and get a mouthful of something, and then drive to ——."

Before the next Sunday, all the world knew that the Barwells were gone abroad, and that the Colonel had made Mrs. Gregson a present of that beautiful phaeton and pair of ponies, in which she had been driving about all the week; and, as they made their appearance at church in the new britchka, which resembled the Barwells' as nearly as one carriage could resemble another, no doubt was entertained but that the Colonel had either given his to Mrs. Gregson, or that Mr. Gregson had bought it.

Very mortifying indeed was it to Mr. Gregson therefore, on the Monday morning, when Mr

Mason, the linen-draper, who had stopped him in the market-place, observed, "So, you've got the Colonel's old carriage, I hear—may I ask what you gave him for it? I think of buying a second-hand one myself: only a second-hand price, I suppose; and, between friends, got it for an old song, I dare say!"

"My good fellow," said Mr. Gregson, very much piqued, "you don't know much about carriages! Why, man, mine's spic and span new!—only came from the maker's last week You're thinking of my wife's pony-phaeton—that was a present to her from Colonel Barwell!"

"It's a lucky thing to be your wife!" exclaimed Mr. Mason; but, being determined to say something disagreeable, because Mrs. Gregson had cut his wife's acquaintance, as well as left his shop, he added, "But Gregson, everybody says you have got the Colonel's old carriage, for they are as like as pea to pea!"

"What an envious old scamp it is!" muttered Mr. Gregson to himself, as he walked onward to his warehouse. And the idea that everybody thought he had got the Colonel's old carriage, haunted him all day.

"Where did the Colonel sell the britchka and the horses?" asked Mrs. Gregson, from one of the Moreby Lodge grooms, whom she met one day near the Elms; for an unpleasant suspicion lurked in her mind, that they had given serious offence by having ordered this britchka of their own; in consequence of which, her husband had not been favoured with the commission.

"Master sent 'em to Tattersal's, said the man; "and the britchka went to London too."

"He talked of selling them in this neighbourhood," remarked Mrs. Gregson.

"He altered his mind the night afore he set off," replied the groom, "else we'd orders to take 'em to Mr. Gregson's," said he, touching his hat.

Mrs. Gregson gave the man half-a-crown, although the information was gall and wormwood to her; and he went off laughing to himself, for he knew the rumour in Woodburn of Mr. Gregson having the old carriage; and he supposed the lady's questions had reference to this subject.

It is not at all an extraordinary case, that when people rise ever so little in the world, their acquaintance are filled with envy and all uncharitableness. It seemed to the Gregsons to be especially so in their case; for all Woodburn appeared to be at feud with them since they had been noticed by the Barwells, and had removed to the Elms; but more particularly so, since they drove to church in a handsome carriage.

"Hang the britchka!" exclaimed Mr. Gregson to his wife, several weeks afterwards; "I wish I had never had it! I can go nowhere in Woodburn, but people, out of sheer malice I am sure, are saying something to me about its being a second-hand affair;—as if I were in the habit of buying second-hand things!—as well ask if my coat is second-hand!"

"They know well enough," said Mrs. Gregson, "that it is not second-hand; but it is all their envy! I told you I met that Mrs. Browne, when

Lucy and I first drove into the town in the pony-phaeton; and she looked ready to eat us! Besides, how can they take the britchka for the Barwells'? —they might see that the Colonel's crest is not on it, nor ever was."

"The mischief is," said Mr. Gregson, "that the Barwells went away just when they did. If they had only staid one Sunday longer, all would have been right."

"If they had staid one Sunday longer, all would have been wrong—worse than it is," thought his wife: "they then never would have forgiven us; and even now I am frightened at the thoughts of their coming back again!"

The Barwells, however, did not come back again so soon as was expected. Mrs. Gregson hoped that she might have a letter, but none came; and, at the end of three months, she and Lucy drove to Moreby Lodge, to inquire from the housekeeper when the family might be expected. "Not at present," was the answer: "Mrs. Barwell liked the continent so much, that they were going a tour into Switzerland, and into Vienna, she believed; and it would certainly not be before the end of autumn that they would return; which would make it upwards of twelve instead of three months."

This information was quite a relief. "Perhaps," thought she, "they never will return!" It almost seemed to her more desirable they should not; for she could not help fearing that the same measure of favour would not be dealt to them as formerly.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HELP TO GREATNESS.

Though the Barwells were out of England, and Mrs. Gregson had cut all her former Woodburn acquaintance, and although no new ones had been formed with any of the higher families, either of the town or its neighbourhood, since they removed to their new house, yet Mr. Gregson, who loved to sit down to a table surrounded by guests, contrived that there should be no lack of visitors at the Elms. Many a rich farmer and his family, the purchase of whose dairies was an hereditary thing to Gregson, came to dine and stop all night. The young Gregsons also had their acquaintances, who came of an evening, and smoked cigars in the shrubberies, or played at bowls; whilst the clergyman of Woodburn, a Mr. Vincent, a quiet old bachelor, and the apothecary and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Dawes—the three standing dishes of every table, as Mr. Gregson called them—were always ready and willing to be entertained.

Mr. Gregson, spite of his aspirings after gentility, which it had given his wife such satisfaction to discover, "was not," as he said, "one to reject a good thing, because it was no better." If he could not visit with the Jennings, and the Sykes Willoughbys, and all that set, there was no reason why he should turn hermit. He would have such

as he could get; and, if they were not so grand, why, they were all the merrier—that was the only difference. And, as for a dance, they could have one any time—for he liked young fellows that could dance in their boots, and girls that would not turn up their noses at a partner, because he had not new white kid gloves!

Thus easily satisfied, Mr. Gregson kept the Elms all alive; and every Sunday, and not unfrequently once or twice in the course of the week besides, gave a dinner, and dined out likewise; driving his wife and daughter to substantial granges, and farm-houses, and old manor-houses, that had come a little down in the world, across the country, through roads intended for taxed carts, or those with no springs at all, in his handsome britchka, very little, of course, to its improvement.

Now, let it not be supposed that there was any philosophy in Mr. Gregson's thus being satisfied with society merely of his own class. In the secret of his heart he wished to take a stand among the country gentry—to visit wherever the Brownes did; but, though he was striving after it by all means in his power, he never confessed as much to his wife.

She, on the contrary, was always railing against farmers and farmers' wives, and was thinking, with herself, that she would give anything to know the secret by which the Brownes managed to get the footing in society they did. At length she came to the decision, that the cause of this difference must be in the husbands. Browne never would do as her husband did; he never would make himself part and parcel with farmers,

and such like; he never would be content with tenants, while landlords were to be had.

Partly on the plea, therefore, of being out of health, and partly on that of the state of the roads, which tried and injured the carriage-springs so much, she began to decline invitations, making up her mind not to compromise her claim to a higher class of society, by connecting herself entirely with this; but to wait for Mrs. Barwell's return, and trust to fortunate circumstances opening the way to visiting among Mrs. Barwell's friends; especially as Lucy was now growing so womanly, and so handsome.

We have said before, that Mrs. Gregson seemed to be a favourite of fortune; for she seldom earnestly desired anything, which, by one means or other, was not brought about. Accordingly, the very next autumn—about the time when the Barwells were expected to return—an accident happened, which occasioned the family to become acquainted with the Sykes Willoughbys. It occurred thus:—

One fine breezy autumn afternoon, Mr. Gregson and his eldest son were out with their dogs —for they had become great sportsmen since they lived at the Elms—and were looking out for a covey of partridges, which lay in a large plantation bordering a small lake which formed the extreme bound of the Willoughby estate in this direction, and which, at this point, joined Mr. Gregson's land. Young Sykes Willoughby and his sister, and that very Miss Wilmott for whom Lucy had been mistaken, were rowing about the lake; while a fine Newfoundland dog was in the

water, with which all the party were amusing themselves. For frolic, or from want of thought, the young man called the dog to enter the boat—the young ladies, laughing and screaming, and protesting he should not; and, as he still swam nearer, and still was urged by his master to do so, one, or both of them, started up, and upset the boat. It was the act of an instant; and, in the same instant, Mr. Gregson, who was a strong man, and a good swimmer, threw off his coat, and sprang into the water to their rescue, not, however, before he had ordered his son to run home instantly for the britchka. The sagacious creature which had been the innocent means of the accident, caught hold of Miss Wilmott's dress, and drew her to land; whilst Mr. Gregson bore Miss Willoughby out of the water, and then returned to her brother, who, being but an indifferent swimmer, yet sustained himself from sinking, by having caught hold of the boat as it resettled itself in the water. Their peril was imminent; and nothing but Mr. Gregson's presence, and presence of mind, could have saved them all.

They had not to wait long for the carriage, into which Mrs. Gregson had most thoughtfully put a quantity of cloaks and blankets—pleased beyond measure to have thus an opportunity of rendering service so essential to the Sykes Willoughbys. The two young ladies, dripping wet, and frightened half out of their senses, were wrapped in blankets, and put into the carriage, together with their brother, who all the while made light of the affair; it was then closed, and young Gregson mounted the box beside his

father, who, although he was wet to the skin, merely wrapped a couple of great coats about him, and drove home with the utmost expedition.

They found the gates set open to receive them, and Mrs. Gregson herself at the hall door, with servants, who insisted upon carrying the young ladies up stairs to bed. It was in vain they protested that they were only wet, and that there was no danger; and that, if dry clothes might but be sent for, they were able to go home. Mrs. Gregson would hear of nothing but their going to bed. A fire was burning in the chamber, and in the dressing-room likewise, where they found warm night-clothes and flannel gowns, and Lucy, full of tender anxiety and willing kindness. At length, all sorts of warm cordials had been presented, and everything had been done that could be devised, and the two were left in bed in the very best chamber; whilst young Willoughby, to whom far more attention had been offered than he was willing to accept, was left in bed also, in the second-best room, in which, likewise, a good fire was burning. By the time all this was done, and the running about of servants had pretty nearly ceased, and Mr. Gregson, who was positive about not going to bed, had changed his clothes and drank two strong glasses of hot negus, Mr. Dawes, the apothecary, for whom Mrs. Gregson had sent off express, arrived. Nothing, he declared, more judicious could have been suggested, had he been there himself; and then, assuring the young people that they might look upon themselves as having been once saved by Mr. Gregson, and twice by his wife, he forbade any of them

to leave their rooms, or even their beds, until he had seen them next morning. He next volunteered to take Castle Willoughby in his way home, that he might nullify any alarm, by the good report which he could take.

Mrs. Gregson thanked him; but, the moment she had heard his report, she had, she said, sent off a servant on horseback, that Mr. and Mrs. Sykes Willoughby might be made perfectly easy.

These young people could not, by any means, be called bad-hearted; and yet, now that all danger was over, they wished anybody had saved them, rather than the Gregsons.

"How vexed mamma will be," said Miss Willoughby to her cousin, "to have to thank that horrid Mrs. Gregson, about whom Mrs. Browne has told such absurd things!—and *him* too!—did you ever see such a vulgar person?"

Young Willoughby, although he had not a chamber-companion to whom he could express his sentiments, amused himself by thinking how he would amuse others, by what he called "the humours of the house."

Mrs. Sykes Willoughby never thought, at the first moment, about *whom* she had to thank; she felt too much overjoyed to know that they were safe, to scruple about the means by which they were saved. After a fit of hysterics, therefore, her husband being out shooting in another part of the county, she ordered her close carriage, and, accompanied by her maid, drove to the Elms, although her dinner had been waiting half an hour. Never did a more welcome vision present itself to Mrs. Gregson, than that of this carriage

driving up to her door. Mr. Gregson flew to the carriage steps to receive her; and she entered the house, leaning upon his arm, and pouring out protestations of everlasting gratitude. She was placed in a cushioned chair by the drawing-room fire, with the greatest possible respect; and, after Mrs. Gregson had "feared," some dozen times, "that she was ill," or "that the fatigue would overdo her," or "that she might suffer from this excitement," she yielded to her request to see her children, and was accordingly ushered up stairs by the mistress of the house herself, who failed not, all the while, to insist upon the doctor's injunctions being attended to—that the young people should be left quiet till he had seen them next morning.

A sound of laughter and merriment proceeded from the chamber which held the two young ladies, as they approached the apartment.

"Nobody that hears this would believe that, two hours ago, they were just between life and death," said Mrs. Gregson, as she presented the softly-stepping Mrs. Sykes Willoughby to their bed-side.

The young ladies protested that they were quite well; that they had had an excellent dinner —thanks to Mrs. Gregson—and that now they were quite well enough to be ducked a second time; and they hoped, therefore, the carriage was come for them, with plenty of dry clothes. Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, however, would not hear of their returning home, nor yet of their rising. She then commenced a weak lecture on boating, and on playing with dogs on water; and declared, that

they should never sufficiently thank their good neighbour. Pretty much the same scene took place in her son's chamber, excepting that he out-talked his mother, laughed loud at all her fears for his health, and, in the end, was permitted to get up, dress in the fresh clothes that had been brought, and accompany his mother home.

This adventure, of course, made a great talk in Woodburn; and Mrs. Browne, who knew Mrs. Gregson would be overjoyed to have a door thus opened to her acquaintance with the Sykes Willoughbys, lost not a moment in making a call the next morning, being resolved to depreciate the Gregsons' part of the affair.

"It may be a dangerous piece of water," said she, as she sate with Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, in her morning-room; "but my son, who cannot, by any means, be reckoned a rash young man, has been there times without end; besides, considering that Mr. Henry can swim, and as the dog was with them, there was no danger of them being drowned—the dog alone would have saved them."

"You have such excellent spirits!" said Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, who, from alarm and excitement overnight, was suffering this morning from a nervous attack; "I assure you I have had visions of drowning people before my eyes all night!"

"Mr. Henry himself," continued Mrs. Browne, "says that Mr. Gregson never touched him—he swam—and Neptune certainly drew Miss Wilmott to land—there are the marks of his teeth in the back of her dress—fine fellow!—You ought to

have his picture taken. Besides, if you knew the Gregsons as well as I do!"—Here Mrs. Browne stopped abruptly, and shrugged her shoulders.

"I grant," observed Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, seeing that the other waited for her to speak, "that one does not like to be under obligations to that sort of people. If it had but been some poor man that one could have pensioned, and thus made comfortable for life!—but with such as they, one has no means of returning the obligation."

"Yes, you have—by visiting with them!" said Mrs. Browne, sarcastically, well knowing that to Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, one of the most exclusive people in the whole county, this was what would be particularly unpleasant.

"Impossible! One could not do that," said she.

"They *are* dreadfully vulgar," replied Mrs. Browne; we endured them as long as we could. She was an early humble friend of mine—a sort of companion before I married. They are under great obligations to us, and we did not wish to mortify them; but, upon my word, they are such as you *could not* visit."

Just as these words were spoken, Mrs. Sykes Willoughby's maid knocked at the door, to say that Mrs. Gregson had brought home the young ladies.

"Make my best compliments to Mrs. Gregson," said she, "and say I am extremely unwell this morning. You can say, Stowel, that I have not left my room, and regret I cannot see her; but I will have the honour of calling to make my acknowledgments, the first moment I am able to go out;—and send the young ladies to me."

The message was delivered, and Mrs. Gregson was mortified; and the young ladies having offered her wine and cake, and sate and chatted with her, as a necessary mark of attention, in the absence of Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, saw her depart, and then ran up stairs to make a long history of all that had happened, and to laugh at them all, with Mrs. Browne, and to assure their mother that there really was no danger of their being drowned, considering that Henry could swim, and that they had Neptune with them; and that Mrs. Gregson, and even Miss Gregson, though she was so pretty, and all the family too, were the most amusing people they had ever seen; and that it was almost worth another ducking to pass another such night and morning.

By the time Mr. Sykes Willoughby came home, the adventure came to be considered a mere joke. No sooner, however, did he hear it related, than he treated it in a very different manner. "It was the most dangerous piece of water," he said, "he knew anywhere: that it was nonsense talking of Henry swimming—he could do no such thing; and that, supposing Neptune had saved one, or at most two, they, by that time, would have been insensible; and, who must have summoned help?" He said, in short, that they were fools and blockheads, and talked like asses! and that every one of them owed their lives to Mr. Gregson; and that he himself should go and made his acknowledgments to that gentleman; and that he was happy to know that he had so good a neighbour, who would look after his madcaps in

his absence; that he had heard many excellent things of Mr. Gregson, and he should be proud to shake hands with him.

Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, who always took her opinions from the most energetic speaker, no sooner heard her husband express himself thus, than she thought that certainly they had been very remiss; and that she herself, she then remembered, had promised to call the first time she went out. She therefore proposed to her husband, that they should drive to the Elms together, and that they should take Mrs. Gregson a present of fruit—a fine pineapple, and some of their beautiful grapes. Her husband thought nothing could be more proper; and, between three and four o'clock, just as the Gregsons had done dinner, it was announced that the Sykes Willoughbys' carriage was coming up the drive. Most happy was Mrs. Gregson to think that she and Lucy were well dressed, that there was a good fire in the drawing-room, and that she herself had swept up the hearth before dinner. "It is an excellent plan to have a hearth-brush always at hand," thought Mrs. Gregson, as, in a very agreeable flutter of spirits, she walked into the drawing-room.

While the gentlemen were busy talking on a variety of topics, which grew out of this adventure at the little lake, the ladies likewise were keeping up what seemed like an animated conversation. At length Mrs. Sykes Willoughby spoke of the views from the windows, which, she said, she had always preferred to her own.

"You know this house, then," said Mrs. Gregson.

Mrs. Sykes Willoughby knew it well; she had spent, she said, many happy hours there. They knew Sir Henry Forrester, who built it; and her recollections of the place were all pleasant.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Gregson, you would then like to go over it again. I think you will say, that in our humble way we have made it comfortable; though we don't pretend to vie with Sir Henry Forrester."

Mrs. Sykes Willoughby declared that nothing would give her greater pleasure; and accordingly, from kitchen and larder up to the very attics, did Mrs. Gregson take her visitor; not omitting by any means to open any drawers, or presses, or cupboards, which contained either handsome dresses, stores of linen, plate, or china, or might, in any way, give the lady of Castle Willoughby an idea of their being people of substance, and who understood, likewise, all that was needful in a handsome establishment. When they returned to the drawing-room, they found the gentlemen had also disappeared—Mr. Gregson thinking he might as well show his neighbour, whom he knew to be an amateur farmer and breeder of cattle, his fine brood sow; and so, from the sow to all his other out-door possessions, not forgetting his six-stalled stable, every stall of which was occupied.

During the absence of all parties, Lucy had ordered in some of the best wine in the best decanters, with a heaped silver basket of rich cake; all of which stood upon a massy silver waiter of great value. The fruit which Mrs. Sykes Willoughby had brought, and which, in the meantime had come in, stood also upon the

table. The ladies then sat down to await the gentlemen's return; and, while Mrs. Gregson poured forth thanks for the fruit, Mrs. Sykes Willoughby commended the cake, which she condescended to eat.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Gregson, helping herself a second time to some of the grapes, "these are much finer flavoured than their's at Moreby Lodge."

"You have seen Mrs. Barwell since her return," said Mrs. Sykes Willoughby.

"No! Is she returned?" asked Mrs. Gregson, hastily; and, the next moment, was sorry she had done so.

"She returned three days ago," said the other. "I saw her yesterday; she is looking remarkably well: I understand you are very intimate with her."

"Extremely so," returned Mrs. Gregson, now determined to make all right. "She is my dearest friend; but she loves to surprise one; she took me by surprise when they first came; she cannot have been out yet, or she would have called on me."

"We dined with them at the Brownes', yesterday," said Mrs. Sykes Willoughby.

"Wonderful people the Brownes are," said Mrs. Gregson, more mortified than she would have told, at what she had heard; "very wonderful people! Mr. Gregson lent him the first money he ever had; he, in fact, furnished that house for him in Wilton-street; and I knew her as a girl; her father was a small grocer in Gloucester, and died a bankrupt!"

"She is an extremely clever person," said

Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, "nevertheless, and gives excellent dinners;—Mr. Sykes Willoughby prefers dining there even to the bishop's."

Just then came in the gentlemen. "We are making an unconscionable call, Mrs. Gregson," said Mr. Sykes Willoughby; but your good husband has been decoying me into his farm-yard."

"It is a wonder you have found your way in at all, then," said his wife, rising; "he is so passionately fond of animals," added she, addressing Mrs. Gregson.

After Mr. Sykes Willoughby had taken a couple of glasses of wine, which he greatly commended, and said a few civil things to Lucy, and thanked Mrs. Gregson for the good care she had taken of his young people, they made their adieus and departed, leaving Mrs. Gregson much more uneasy to hear that the Barwells had returned, than pleased that the Sykes Willoughbys had called.

CHAPTER XIV.

GROWING GREATER.

It was then too late to drive to Moreby Lodge; but the next morning Mrs. Gregson and her daughter did not fail to make their visit of welcome. She had scarcely slept the whole night, so full of anxiety was she, fearing lest they had offended past redemption; "and if so," thought she, "what a triumph to the Brownes! And yet, perhaps, after all, there is no need for apprehension; it was but a small thing to give offence by—just

admiring their carriage; and, really if they are offended, they are, as Gregson says, full of rank pride! However, offended or not, all I desire is, that the Brownes should not have a triumph over us; and, now that we have begun so well with the Sykes Willoughbys, if I can but keep up anything like the old intimacy, I shall be satisfied."

Full of the determination to keep up at least something like the old intimacy, she entered the drawing-room where Mrs. Barwell sate at her work, and with her a lady, a visitor, reading. Mrs. Barwell's manner was kind, was unquestionably kind, towards Lucy; she also expressed pleasure in again meeting her mother. An uninterested spectator would have said any one must be satisfied by it; but Mrs. Gregson felt that it was very different to their former meeting; heart was now wanting; that very charm which hitherto had made Mrs. Barwell's lightest word so different to other people's professions of affection. She thought, perhaps this difference was occasioned by the presence of a stranger, and therefore she manœuvered all kind of ways to send Lucy and the lady into the garden or green-house, or to go there herself with Mrs. Barwell. But none of her hints were taken, and they still sate together, talking on common topics. Towards Lucy, however, as we said, much of her former cordiality remained. She regretted that her niece was not then at home; she and her uncle were gone out for a ride on horseback. "The Colonel," said she, "is so happy to have a riding companion; and Mary Anne rides admirably; but I must, nevertheless, find you some amusement; you can turn over

these volumes of engravings, which we collected in Germany; they are, many of them, very fine. I have some excellent Italian and German music for you. I hope you practise as much as you did, and that you love music even more. I did not forget you when I was abroad."

Whilst Mrs. Gregson heard the kind voice of Mrs. Barwell thus speaking to her daughter, she felt as if she could throw herself on her neck, and weep and pray that they might be as formerly; but with this relenting mood came the thoughts of the old uncle and aunt who sold tea, and who had been held up to her as constant examples; and she knew that with the old intimacy must come the counsels and the warnings, which were so abhorrent to her spirit; and therefore she determined to let things take their own way.

They talked, of course, of the adventure of the little lake, and of Mr. Gregson's heroism; and then she told of the Sykes Willoughby's call, and the present of "beautiful fruit;" and dwelt rapturously on the "charming conversation and manners" of the whole family; adding, "what an advantage it would be to Lucy to be acquainted with them!" Had any peculiar expression passed over Mrs. Barwell's countenance whilst she was thus talking, it would instantly have stopped her, or have qualified what she meant to say; but none did: she differed from her on some points, and acquiesced in others, in the most cool and natural way possible, but rather as if with an acquaintance than an intimate friend; and therefore, Mrs. Gregson said more than at first she intended, as if to elicit some more decided sentiment. She

told her that the Sykes Willoughbys would dine with them soon; that Mr. Gregson had asked them, and that they had declared it would give them pleasure; and she hoped, therefore, that Colonel and Mrs. Barwell would meet them. It might have been the most common thing in the world for the Sykes Willoughbys to dine with the Gregsons, from the manner in which Mrs. Barwell accepted the invitation, "for whatever time it might be;" adding, that "the day before, they had dined with them at Mr. Browne's." Mrs. Gregson did not choose to make any observation respecting the Brownes' giving great dinners, lest even a glance might throw her observation back upon herself; but she did venture one remark, just as a sort of memento of old times, that "the Brownes were going on just as usual. She supposed Mrs. Barwell had heard that they had bought a great estate somewhere in the north of England." Mrs. Barwell said that she had; that a great deal was said about it the last night; it appeared to be a very fine estate; and, added she, smiling, "he is now lord of a manor, and she lady of a castle; young Browne too is up there shooting; we had moor-fowl from the estate, and fish too from the lakes."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mrs. Gregson, with an upward jerk of her head.

Now, as it happened that the Gregsons' removal to the Elms was the mainspring of the Brownes' possessing themselves of this estate, which lay on the borders, whilst Mrs. Gregson, therefore, is finishing her call at Moreby Lodge, we may as well say a few words on the subject.

The Elms, as we before remarked, had been the place, of all others, which Mr. and Mrs. Browne had desired to possess for themselves. Sorely galling, therefore, was it, not only to see it in the hands of another, and that other, Mr. Gregson himself, but also to be conscious that he (Browne) as a lawyer, with whom the deeds, in part, had been deposited, had been gulled out of it by a lawyer more cunning than himself. They, however, were politic people; and it never was suspected by the world, nor even by the Gregsons, that they had had the slightest wish to possess it. To every one, therefore, they depreciated the place. "The title was not the best in the world," Browne said; "and it would be well if Gregson did not find in the end that he had a dear bargain." "The house was damp, and the water was bad," Mrs. Browne said; "she had it from excellent authority." She even persuaded old Mrs. Jennings that she herself had told her so; and the poor old lady, whose intellects were now none of the clearest, actually fancied that Sir Henry Forrester's housekeeper had told her so.

As the Gregsons, therefore, now were landed proprietors, it was not to be expected that the Brownes could remain satisfied with merely a house in Wilton-street, to which not even half an acre of land belonged. Many were the places he turned his eye upon—becoming more and more ambitious the longer the idea dwelt with him. Perhaps, however, the circumstance of the Gregsons having two carriages might act as a spur to his ambition; certain it is, that about that time he, too, began to drive a pair of horses, and

actually set off, he and Mrs. Browne, to somewhere in the North, with four post-horses. It made a great talk in Woodburn at the time: an old client, it was said, was on his death-bed, and Mr. Browne was sent for to make his will; and then, it was said, that he was appointed ward to a minor of weak intellects; and, shortly afterwards, that he had purchased a vast estate in Northumberland, to which all kinds of manorial privileges were appended; that the family house was a fine castle; and now, this very autumn, young Browne, and some of his college friends, were gone up shooting there.

The Woodburn people, after this, no longer wondered at any expense that the Brownes went to: they were looked upon as among the richest people of the neighbourhood; and their dinners, and her dresses and evening parties, and young Browne's college life, and his shooting excursions in the North, to which he set out from Woodburn, accompanied by a keeper, pointers, dog-cart, and two Joe Mantons, said to have cost a hundred guineas, no longer made a nine days' wonder, but were only regarded as every-day occurrences. But there was yet one family with whom their doings still excited attention; and that, it is needless to say, was the Gregsons. "I wonder what will be the end of all this!" and "Well, to be sure!" and, "Was ever the like heard!" and, "Those people are the most extraordinary that ever lived!" accompanied by all kinds of significant nods and looks, were heard at the dinner-table, and by the fireside, at the Elms, whenever the Brownes were talked of; neither

Mr. nor Mrs. Gregson ever seeming to remember that they were doing the very things themselves, though, perhaps, in a less exalted style, as the people they were censuring. The fact was, that these two families were, and had been for years, like rivals in a race;—the moment one seemed to be getting ahead, the efforts of the other were excited to shoot past, by some excelling piece of grandeur or expense.

Having said thus much to bring up the career of the Brownes to the present moment, we must return to Mrs. Gregson, whom we left sitting with Mrs. Barwell. When she reviewed her call at Moreby Lodge, it was impossible to say what her exact feelings were. It was evident to herself, that Mrs. Barwell was now quite willing that she should take a rank in society above tradespeople; that she was not going to be surprised, nor yet to regret, their giving great dinner parties: she herself was treated no longer, either "as an humble friend, or as an upper servant;" the very thing she had wished for, seemed to have been brought about—she was treated as an equal in rank. But what did all this imply? that Mrs. Barwell had ceased to feel the solicitude and affection of an earnest friend. Very probably so; but, argued Mrs. Gregson with herself, on these terms I stand better with the world: on these terms I shall not again be bored with those everlasting old shop-keepers! and I am not quite sure whether all that interference, and giving advice, was not impertinent; at all events, she never would have done so with Mrs. Browne: another thing, Mrs. Browne never would have permitted

it, for, with all her faults, she does not want spirit! To Lucy, certainly, she is as kind as ever; and if I can but make Lucy and Miss Barwell friends, all will be right; and, if so, I think things are much better as they are.

Mrs. Gregson, however, could not forget the affair of the britchka, and she felt a little anxious about their first being seen by the Barwells in it; it would, however, she thought, be better to take all quietly, and as a matter of course, and go to church in it as usual. Still, she could not help wondering what kind of carriage they would have—whether a new one, and anything like the old; and this wonder she expressed to her husband.

"I have seen them driving in two carriages," said he—"one sees them everywhere!—one, a sort of britchka, but much lower and lighter than ours—a splendid little thing—drawn by a pair of grey cobs. If he had made you a present of such a thing, there would have been some sense in it! The other is a large, heavy carriage, with four black horses, and postilions."

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Gregson.

"They seem inclined to cut a pretty dash!" said her husband.

"They are, at all events, determined that we shall not imitate them again," thought she; and, someway, she was troubled all day by the idea of this surpassing equipage; for she fancied it had a mortifying reference to them.

In a few days, the very coach and four brought Mrs. Barwell to return Mrs. Gregson's call, and to introduce Miss Barwell to Lucy. Spite of her cordiality to Lucy, Mrs. Gregson felt still more

impressed by the punctiliousness of her demeanour to herself. "There will be no danger now," she thought, "of her dismissing her carriage, and insisting upon taking tea with us at six o'clock, as she did in Bridge-street; but then, I've got rid of the old tea-shop!"

Whilst Mr. and Mrs. Gregson were thinking, one day, very seduously, about giving their first great dinner-party, there came formal cards of invitation to them to dine with Colonel and Mrs. Barwell on the 30th instant, which was then two weeks off; and cards also for the same evening, for Miss Gregson, and Mr. Thomas and Mr. George Gregson;—quadrilles to commence at 10 o'clock. All the house was at once put into a delightful flutter. Mrs. Gregson had never seen her husband so well pleased before.

"Yes, yes," said he, laughing and rubbing his hands; "you may talk as you will about Mrs. Barwell's good sense, and philosophy, and friendship for you, but you see she's every bit as weak as other people! We never were good enough to go to their parties till somebody greater than themselves had noticed us; and, it seems I may thank the young Sykes Willoughbys' tumbling into the water, for the honour of dining at Moreby Lodge."

His wife joined him in laughing, as if she thought he was right; but in truth, she knew that the true cause of their being invited to dine with a grand party at Moreby, was because they had forfeited the esteem of its mistress—they were no more to her now than common acquaintance.

A most properly worded note, stating that Mr. and Mrs. Gregson would have the honour of dining at Moreby Lodge on the 30th instant, was written and despatched—the same likewise, on behalf of the young people; and, Mr. Gregson being unusually good-humoured, gave his wife two twenty pound bills, telling her that he should expect to see both Lucy and herself looking as well as anybody, if it were only to show that they knew how to do things handsomely.

It would not be quite the thing, Mr. and Mrs. Gregson decided, to give their dinner before the 30th, therefore that subject was dismissed for the present; besides, said the lady, I shall like to see how Mrs. Barwell manages; for I would not, for the world, do anything shabbily.

Before they gave their dinner, it so happened, however, that she had a double opportunity of seeing how a great entertainment was managed; for, the very week after the invitation came from Moreby Lodge, one came also from Castle Willoughby, for the 7th of the following month—dinner and evening party, the young Gregsons and Lucy also being included. Anybody may conceive what an everlasting subject these two important events would furnish; morning, noon and night, if they were not talked of, they were at least thought of. It was several days before Mrs. Gregson could decide upon what she would wear; at length she fixed upon black velvet, with a turban of gold tissue.

In this dress, therefore, she made her appearance; and, as she had the good taste not to over-

load herself with indifferent jewellery, she looked very well. "Not unlike a gentlewoman," thought Mrs. Barwell, as she saw her enter the room.

To Mrs. Gregson's delight, the Brownes were there—she too in black velvet. Not a word of recognition passed between them, but a look of triumph on Mrs. Gregson's part, and of contemptuous indifference on that of Mrs. Browne. This latter lady, however, had greatly the advantage in one respect; she was quite at her ease, while her *quondam* friend was by far too conscious, too solicitous to look pleased, either to be easy or natural.

It was more than a year since Mrs. Gregson had seen Browne; it was more than three years since she had been in his company, and she was now forcibly struck by his appearance: he looked so old, so anxious, so abstracted, so shrunk as it were into himself. She could not but remark the difference between him and her husband—stout and open-visaged, full of enjoyment as he appeared, and listened to as an oracle by a circle of country gentlemen, to whom Mr. Sykes Willoughby had introduced him, as a breeder of the finest pigs in England; whilst poor Mr. Browne sate in a corner of a sofa, speaking to no one, and, if addressed, looking as if roused from a reverie for a moment, and then relapsing into the same state of abstraction as before.

"How dreadfully Mr. Browne looks to-night!" said she to Mrs. Barwell.

"Poor man!" she replied, without glancing towards him, "he is wearing himself out."

"By his profession you mean," said Mrs. Gregson.

"He is making haste to grow rich too fast," observed Mrs. Barwell.

Mrs. Gregson made no answer, for she felt as if a reproach were implied; and, the next moment, dinner was announced. The sight of the costly dinner-service of solid silver, all of the most exquisite workmanship, filled the heart of poor Mrs. Gregson with despair. "I never can come up to this," thought she. "I wonder what kind of dinner-service the Brownes have: I wish I could know!" She inadvertently glanced across the table to where Mrs. Browne sate, and their eyes met. It seemed as if Mrs. Browne had divined the thought which was in her rival's mind, and she smiled as if in derision; that smile, and the consciousness of the thought, made Mrs. Gregson blush; and that blush was excessively mortifying, particularly as she felt that Mrs. Browne's eyes were still upon her: in her heart she hated her. In the course of the evening, however, her triumph came, for everybody admired Lucy;—such a sweet countenance, and so beautiful; and she danced so well too—not even the beautiful Miss Wilmott surpassed her. To her mother's great delight, she observed that young Sykes Willoughby danced with her five times. She wished that "Bonnie Prince Charlie" had but been there, to have seen how he would have gone on, and whether he would have paid her any attention. He, however, was in the North; and, spite of her secret wish that he had been there, she felt

annoyed when everybody regretted his absence: but he will be back, said they, in time for the ball at Castle Willoughby; and then, thought she, I shall see him.

Whilst Lucy was dancing with Henry Sykes Willoughby, Tom Gregson was dancing with Miss Barwell. "Do you see how well they are matched?" whispered Mr. Gregson to his wife. His words conveyed the idea he intended, and a new ambition at once took possession of her.

Mr. and Mrs. Gregson went home delighted. It was a great coming down, to Tom and George to go next morning to the warehouse, and make entries in the great ledger about anything so vulgar as cheese. Their father himself felt rather mdisposed for business, and told them that he should not go down to Woodburn that day, but that they must do double duty for him. Whether or not they did so may be a questionable thing.

The great party at Castle Willoughby was now the object towards which all desires were turned. Mrs. Gregson bought brocaded satin for this occasion; Lucy, who before had worn pink satin, was now to be dressed in white, with blush roses in her hair. Her father himself took extraordinary interest in her appearance, while he gave to each of his sons ten pounds, that they might still farther replenish their wardrobes.

"Now, boys, you must mind your p's and q's, let me tell you," said he, "for the Bonnie Prince will be there!"

All the Gregsons indeed kept this in view; and not only that the son was to be there, but that the parents were to be there also. "And I'll mind

and not be put out of countenance again by that woman," thought Mrs. Gregson. All those expectations of meeting the Brownes, however, were destined to be disappointed. The Brownes were not there, and Mrs. Gregson had the mortification of hearing everybody regretting the circumstance.

"I am sorry we shall not see Mrs. Browne to-night, nor yet Mr. Charles Edward," said one.

"Gone into the North, did you say, Mrs. Sykes Willoughby?" asked another.

"Yes," was her reply, "quite unexpectedly. I had a note only a few hours ago."

"Something about a law-suit!" said a gentleman, who carried his hands under his coat-laps, and looked very knowing: "well, if it do not lead him into Chancery."

"What! something wrong about his title?" asked Mr. Gregson, chuckling, because Browne had said the title to the Elms was bad.

"Can't say—can't say!" repeated the gentleman who hid his hands; and, further than that, the Gregsons could that night get no information. Again Lucy was much admired, and again she danced with young Sykes Willoughby, and again Tom danced with Miss Barwell. Everything seemed to the Gregsons as it should be; and, in the dark of the winter morning, they drove away from Castle Willoughby, in apparent good humour with all the world. One subject, however, was about equally paramount with pleasure in their minds, and that was curiosity respecting the Brownes.

"I'll tell you what," said he to his wife, as they drove along, "that fellow has got to the end of

his means! There'll be a smash up there before long! and I must look after my five hundred pounds!"

"Have not you got that money yet?" asked Mrs. Gregson, in surprise.

"No," returned he; and, so as I've bothered him, he'd have paid it before now if he could! What a fool I have been! And now I think of it, there was a queer rumour some four months ago. Upon my word, though, I'll look sharp after my money now! What must he be buying estates for, and can't pay his debts?" said he, growing angry as he thought of his probable loss.

"I'm sure I would have it!" said his wife.

"Never fear but I will!" said he, "if I sell him up for it."

The next day, Mr. Gregson failed not to present himself at Browne's office, and, in his absence, demanded to see the confidential clerk. To him he presented his demand for five hundred pounds, borrowed money, and three years' interest. The clerk said he had no orders to pay it, but that he would communicate with Mr. Browne.

"When will he be back?" asked he.

The clerk could not tell.

"What! he's in hiding, is he?" asked Gregson.

The clerk was taken a little by surprise, yet, after a moment's hesitation, he said, "No such thing!" Mr. Browne was at Morpeth; he could give Mr. Gregson his address, if he wished it.

"Now, harkee!" said Gregson, "I know much more than you are aware of. You write, therefore, and tell Browne so; and tell him if he don't send me an order on his banker, by return of

post, for principal and interest, why, I'll send an execution into the house!—that's all." And, striking his fist upon the table, and looking very determined, as if he knew a great deal more than he chose to confess, he got up slowly from his chair, and then, drawing down his waistcoat and drawing up his person, he added, "Now, you see and tell him every word I have said!"

The clerk said that he would, but he was sure Mr. Gregson was under a gross mistake, and, he must confess, had not behaved like a gentleman.

Mr. Gregson did not choose to bandy words with Mr. Browne's clerk, and therefore, merely nodding, as much as to say, he knew what he was about, left the office.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

Mrs. Barwell, whose good opinion of Lucy Gregson had been raised still higher by the modesty and propriety of her behaviour, the two evenings she had been in her company, was quite willing to make her the associate of her niece; and therefore, a few days after the party at the Willoughbys, she drove to the Elms for the purpose of inviting her to spend a few days with her. Nothing could have given Mrs. Gregson greater pleasure, nor was Lucy less pleased; but her mother had ulterior purposes to serve, of which she knew nothing.

Several weeks had now passed on, and two

subjects were beginning to be deeply interesting to the Gregsons. In the first place, Lucy being frequently at Moreby Lodge, afforded opportunities for her brother Tom to go there too. Tom was reckoned handsome, and, his mother flattered herself, would be found irresistible by any young lady, let her be ever so considerable an heiress But caution and circumspection, and all kind of prudent virtues, were needful, lest the suspicions of the uncle and aunt were excited, and thus not only her hopes for her son defeated, but all intimacy between the families cut off for ever.

After Lucy had paid two visits, her mother proposed that Miss Barwell should return them by one long visit. There was considerable demur and difficulty on Mrs. Barwell's part, but at last she consented, that "certainly she should visit them before long, but that Lucy must not object to give three visits for one." Lucy, therefore, paid another visit, and then Miss Barwell was allowed to go to the Elms for two days. "Two days are as nothing!" said Mrs. Gregson to her husband; "however, we must make the most of them!"

Tom was never at the warehouse for one single hour. He drove Miss Barwell out in his mother's pony phaeton; she and Lucy rode out together on horseback, accompanied by him; they played at chess together; he turned over the leaves of her music-book, and even sang with her; for, among his other accomplishments, Tom Gregson sang very well. His father and mother were delighted.

"Fair and softly," said Mr. Gregson, rubbing

his hands, "and he'll carry the day. There is nothing like being first in the field!"

A few days afterwards, Mrs. Gregson met Miss Barwell in the Sykes Willoughbys' carriage: there was Mrs. Sykes Willoughby, and her son, and Miss Barwell; and the two young people were laughing and talking together. It was a very unpleasant thing to see; and the more so, as she did not doubt but that this match would be thought desirable by all parties. She had laid out young Sykes Willoughby for her own daughter; but if this connexion were to be formed with the Barwells, there was an end to both her schemes at once.

This scheme of securing the heiress for Tom was the subject first and foremost in the Gregsons' mind; but there was another subject also, which was hardly less interesting, and that was the growing rumour respecting the embarrassments of the Brownes.

The family was still in the North, although, it was said, that they were daily expected; and Gregson was waiting for that daily return, to have his claim satisfied—Browne having himself written to assure him of payment being made the first moment he came back. Week after week, however, went on, without their returning, and all Woodburn began to talk; something, evidently, was wrong. There was a law-suit, some said, and that this grand estate in the North would all go to pay off law-expenses. The fact was, that this estate was the property of a certain Mr. Warrilow, a person of weak intellects, whose wardship Browne had, by some means, obtained.

He was pensioned with a farmer on the estate, at small cost, and Browne had taken possession of the whole as his own. It happened, however, that Warrilow had an uncle, or cousin, a shrewd man of business, in Glasgow, of whose existence Browne had been unaware: this person had now come forward in his relative's behalf, and threatened all kind of desperate actions at law, and disgraceful disclosures, if every penny were not refunded, and all given up as it had been received in trust, ten years before. Ten years of expenditure, such as the Brownes' had been, who never looked for a day of reckoning, had made awful inroads into the funds of the estate; to say nothing of the ten years of rent, which had all gone.

Browne knew, from the first, that there was nothing but ruin and disgrace before him, yet he clung to possession as a drowning man to a twig, and tried all means which his lawcraft could suggest, to delay, at least, the day of reckoning. It was this which had taken, and now kept, the Brownes in the North; for Browne, unlike Gregson, in all his schemes of self-aggrandizement, made his wife his confidant; nay, in fact, it was believed that she was the mainspring of this affair; at least, the farmer who had poor Warrilow in keeping, declared that all his orders were received from her.

Indistinct rumours of all this reached Woodburn, and demands of all kinds poured in upon the distracted head clerk. At length it became necessary that the Brownes should make their appearance, to save the very household furniture

from the hands of the creditors, among whom Gregson was the most clamorous.

We have said how haggard and anxious poor Mr. Browne looked on the night of the Barwells' party. It was with a countenance ten times more worn and anxious, that he again made his appearance in his office. Not like his, however, was the appearance of his wife; she looked portly, as usual; and, if some traces of anxiety appeared in her countenance, they might easily be accounted for by the vexatious rumours which had been maliciously circulated, she said, as, on the day after their return, she drove round Woodburn in her carriage, from shop to shop, wherever a bill was owing, paying every one out of a large purse, which to the last moment seemed full.

After she had thus gloriously, as she said, given the lie to all the Woodburn slander, she drove to make calls on all her friends, and to leave, as she said to herself, a legacy for the Gregsons. Wherever she went, therefore, she did not fail to say, (which she did on speculation, although it proved to be nearer the truth than she was aware of,) "that everybody was talking of young Gregson and Miss Barwell; that it was shocking to think what that artful woman, Mrs. Gregson, was capable of doing; and that everybody who had the least respect for Mrs. Barwell, ought to warn her of what was going forward."

One tithe of what Mrs. Browne said would have been enough; however, she was resolved not to do her work by halves; so she drove to the Jenningses, and to old Mrs. Robinson's, and

Miss Carr's, and to a dozen other houses besides, and then to Castle Willoughby, where, as if fortune would befriend her, Mrs. Sykes Willoughby said, she herself had had the same suspicion, and had thought seriously of mentioning it to Mrs. Barwell, but that they were under an obligation to the Gregsons—at least Mr. Sykes Willoughby thought so—and therefore she hardly knew what to do: "however," said she, "if you will give me a seat in your carriage, I will accompany you to Moreby Lodge, and we can both speak of it; it will thus have double effect."

Nothing could have been more satisfactory to Mrs. Browne; and, in half an hour's time, they filled Mrs. Barwell's mind with burning indignation. She, however, did not seem as much incensed as she really was, and, of course, as the two ladies thought, she ought to have been; and, what was still more, they both saw Lucy herself helping Miss Barwell to feed a pair of love-birds. They exchanged very intelligent glances, and, as they drove home, nodded their heads and said, "Mrs. Barwell must take the consequences; but they were sure it would be a most disgraceful thing for a girl with such a splendid fortune to marry a cheese-monger!"

"And now," said Mrs. Browne to her husband, that same evening, throwing down upon the table the purse from which she had paid the bills in the morning, "I have saved your credit for one day at least! Three hundred pounds now remain in this purse; your clothes are packed, so are mine, and all is now ready for our departure. Charles Edward writes me word that the passage money

is paid, and they, when we are on board, only will wait for fair wind. Sufficient is secured to us to keep us far above want—let them take the rest! One comfort at least I shall have to my dying day," said she triumphantly, "I have done for the Gregsons!"

That same evening Lucy Gregson was sent home in Mrs. Barwell's little carriage. She was in tears as she entered the drawing-room, where her mother was sitting.

"Good gracious! what is amiss child?" exclaimed she, frightened by her daughter's tears and her unexpected return.

"I shall never go to Moreby Lodge again!" said Lucy; "read that," and she gave her mother a letter from Mrs. Barwell.

The next morning the Brownes were gone, no one knew whither. No sooner was this noised abroad than creditors, among whom was Gregson, rushed in with demands for money; mortgages and bonds of all kinds; club money; soldiers' pensions; widows' annuities, and orphans' portions! And, spite of all that the so lately-satisfied tradesmen could say, one deep, if not loud, execration rung through Woodburn.

Such was the career of two families, who, with every means to secure and diffuse rational happiness, pursued only the miserable aim of outshining each other.

THE END.

This book is DUE on the last
date stamped below

N REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
00 376 228 3
PR Howitt -
4809 Who shall be
H2w greatest
PR
4809
H2w